The Progressive

November 2015

Human Rights Around the World

THE CRACKDOWN ON EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS

AFGHANISTAN'S REFUGEE CRISIS

IRANIANS REACT TO THE NUCLEAR DEAL

\+ JOHN NICHOLS INTERVIEWS SOCIALIST COUNCILWOMAN KSHAMA SAWANT

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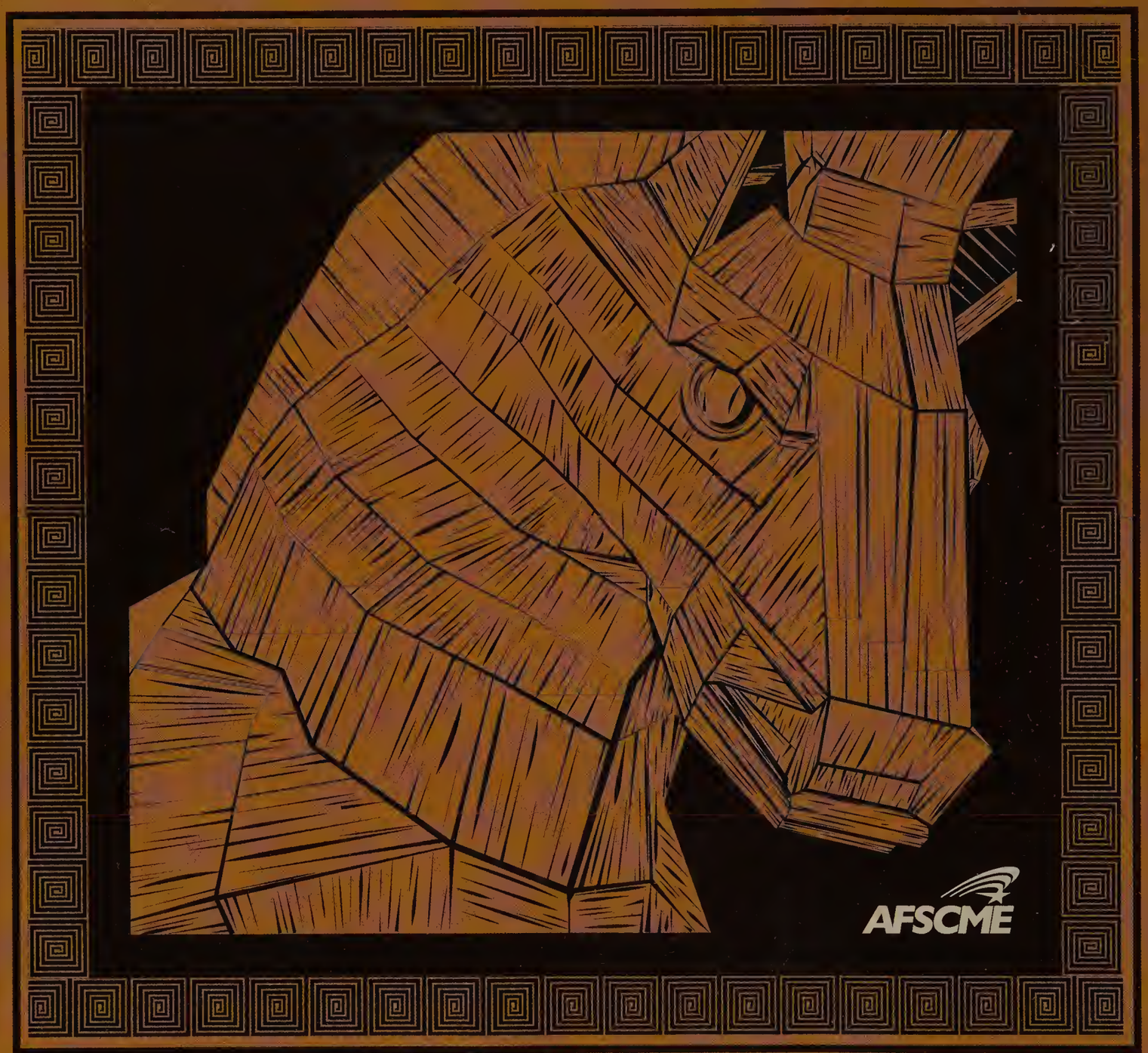
RICHARD BORGE

— America's middle class is facing a new battle —



Almost no one stands up for average Americans these days. Now there's a Supreme Court case looming that could make our unbalanced economy even worse.

Go to **www.AmericaWorksTogether.us** to find out what's in store for America's middle class in the *Friedrichs v. CTA* Trojan Horse.

AFSCME
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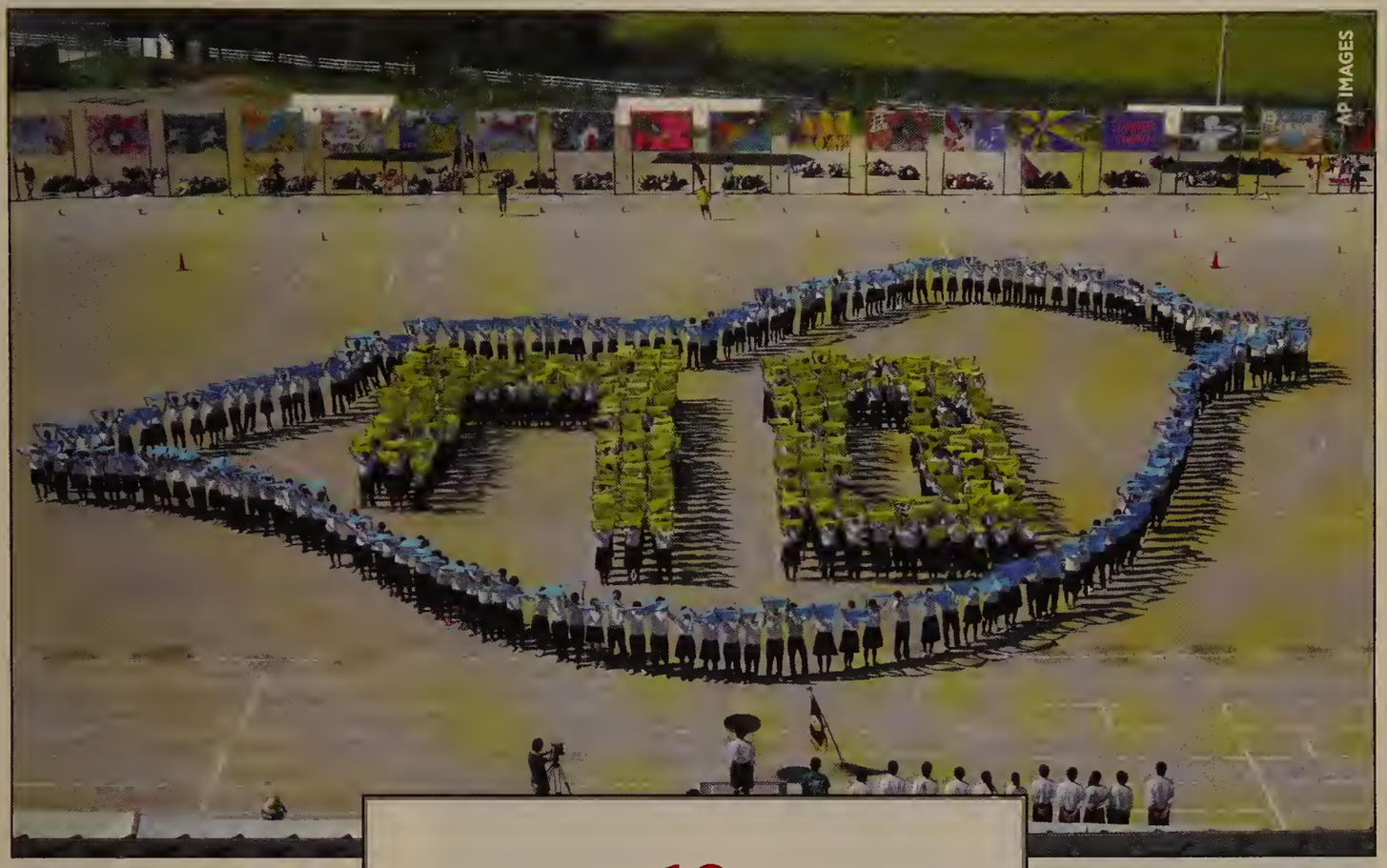
Let's make sure the American Dream doesn't become ancient history.

CONTENTS


AP IMAGES

5 **Editor's Note**

6 **Comment**

8 **No Comment**

9 **Letters**

11 **Projects**

12 **On the Line**

14 **Smoking Gun**

16
Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis
J. Malcolm Garcia

20
Treated Like Enemies: The Crackdown on Egyptian Journalists
Sharif Abdel Kouddous

25
Nuclear Deal Gives Iranian Reformers Hope
Reese Erlich

27
Tobacco's Children
Margaret Wurth

40 **Will Durst**

41 **Dave Zirin**

42 **Poem**

43 **Book Review**

46 **Jim Hightower**

FEATURES

32 **Newark's Fight for Local School Control**
Rebecca Nathanson

36 **'A Mood of Resistance Has Opened Up': An Interview with Kshama Sawant**
John Nichols

Shoppers and storekeepers in Tehran's bazaar are cautiously optimistic that the signing of the nuclear accords will improve the economy.

Preceding page: Japanese children celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

The Progressive *tackles the forces distorting our economy, corrupting our democracy, and imperiling our planet, and champions peace, civil liberties, equality, and justice.*

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We Are All Connected

In this issue of the magazine, we turn our eyes to struggles for democracy and human rights around the globe. From the tobacco fields of Brazil, Margaret Wurth, a children's rights researcher for Human Rights Watch, reports that conditions for child laborers in that country are better than they are here in the United States.

In Egypt, Sharif Abdel Kouddous, who covered the thrilling uprising in his home country during the Arab Spring for *Democracy Now!*, now doggedly pursues the crackdown on his fellow journalists, in what he calls "a vicious and unprecedented assault on press freedom in Egypt over the past two years."

GREG ANDERSON

In Afghanistan, J. Malcolm Garcia interviews civilians who are fleeing violence and chaos, which is getting worse now after fourteen years of U.S. involvement. While the world's attention turns to Syrian refugees streaming into Europe, Garcia reminds us of another group of people fleeing war and oppression for which the United States must take some responsibility.

On a more hopeful note, Reese Erlich updates us from Iran, where reformers in the government and ordinary citizens are optimistic about better times ahead, with the lifting of sanctions now that their country has reached a nuclear accord with the United States and other nations.

Here at home, Rebecca Nathanson writes about the pro-democracy activists in Newark who are fighting for full local control of their public schools, after New Jersey became the first state to pass a law allowing state takeovers of underperforming school districts.

Governor Chris Christie, then-Newark Mayor Cory Booker, and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg hatched a plan to "save" the Newark schools through the ill-considered takeover. That failed effort is the subject of a new book, *The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools?*, by former *Washington Post* reporter Dale Russakoff.

"Zuckerberg intended to try this top-down model for reform in more cities," Russakoff noted in a recent interview on NPR. "He's not trying to do that anymore."

Citizens around the globe are rebelling against efforts to scrap democracy and replace it with top-down control by the rich and powerful.

As we went to press, Bernie Sanders was reporting that he had raised $26 million since July, relying on small donations from 650,000 contributors. Hillary Clinton, who has a super PAC and the support of some very wealthy donors, only narrowly outraised Sanders at $28 million. The once-derided candidacy of the democratic socialist Senator from Vermont now looks as if it could last all the way to the Democratic convention, testing the idea that, without PAC money, negative ads, or expensive polling, a candidate can get traction in a national campaign with a progressive message.

John Nichols has an interview with another socialist who knows how to run a successful campaign. Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant pulls no punches in her fight for higher wages and more local checks on corporate power in her home city. "I think what's happening now globally is that a mood of resistance has opened up," she tells Nichols.

"We are connected internationally," Sawant adds. "I'm very pleased at that connection because, truly, national boundaries obscure the real connections. We have deeper connections with working people in Ireland and South Africa than we do with the elites in the United States, even though they may be geographically closer to us."

Those words could be the theme song for this issue, and for our broader progressive movement.

Solidarity! ◆

Ruth

The Real Costs of War

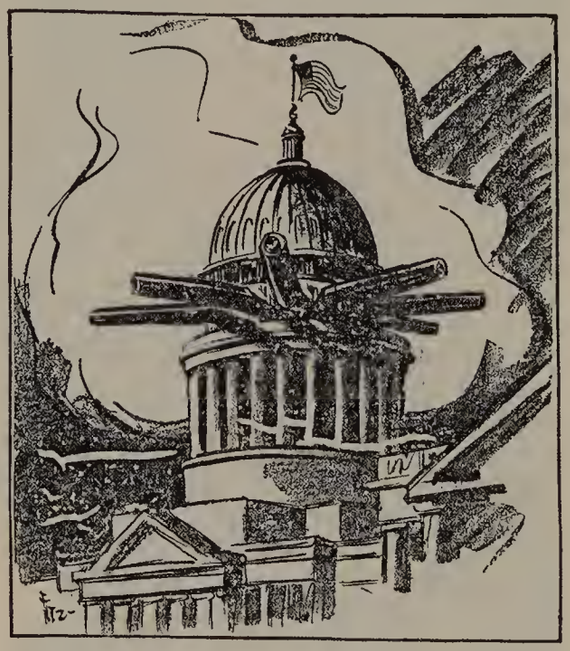
Veterans are on the leading edge of U.S. policy. They absorb the shock—for all Americans—of our choices about getting into wars. They have to confront and deal with how our nation chooses to live in the world in a very deep and personal way.

The late, great Howard Zinn, a World War II vet who was a columnist for *The Progressive*, wrote about Veterans Day, "I do not want the recognition of my service to be used as a glorification of war."

He decried the fact that Veterans Day, "instead of an occasion for denouncing war, has been turned into an occasion for bringing out the flags, the uniforms, the martial music, the patriotic speeches reeking with hypocrisy."

November 11, formerly known as Armistice Day, is the anniversary of the end of the War to End All Wars.

World War I was then the bloodiest war in history—it left thirty-five million dead and disabled, mowed down by machine guns, gassed, their bodies strewn in no-man's land.



FROM LA FOLLETTE'S MAGAZINE, 1915

In the aftermath, there was a widespread belief in this country that we had to move away from war and toward peace.

Out of that came the U.S. leadership in the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, which prohibited the use of war as "an instrument of national policy" except in matters of self-defense.

The promise of that moment faded quickly. War is still an instrument of national policy.

In World War I, between 60 percent and 80 percent of casualties were uniformed military. In Iraq and other modern wars, 90 percent of casualties are civilians.

Disastrous violence throughout the Middle East has generated a wave of desperate refugees fleeing to Europe. Civilians are bearing the brunt of war, injustice, and instability. This is the new face of war—of shock and awe, and the military muscle behind economic shock doctrine—that we confront today.

In his book about the history of the Iraq War, *Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*, British journalist Nicolas Davies reviews the sordid history of U.S. involvement in Iraq, starting with the lies that got us there.

American politicians, the media, and the public have developed a protective amnesia that helps us forget just how outrageous some of our government's actions are.

You may remember that our government spent a lot of time both confirming and denying that the Iraq War had anything to do with oil.

Alan Greenspan called the Iraq War "essential" to secure world oil supplies, adding in his memoir, "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: The Iraq War is largely about oil."

David Sirota recently reported in the *International Business Times* on an email from Hillary Clinton's State Department that shows Clinton told corporate executives, "It's time for the United States to start thinking of Iraq as a business opportunity." Clinton made the comment in a 2011 speech. The State Department email cites J.P. Morgan and ExxonMobil specifically, and calls Iraq a "market where your companies can make money," Sirota reports. This is consistent with Bush Administration policy, which pushed privatization in Iraq to benefit U.S. corporations.

"When then-U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton voted to authorize the war against Iraq in 2002, she justified her support for the invasion as a way to protect America's national security," Sirota writes. "But less than a decade later . . . Clinton promoted the war-torn country as a place where American corporations could make big money."

In Afghanistan, too, the United States has failed to protect civilians, while seeking revenge for the attacks of September 11 and defending U.S. strategic interests. Journalist Anand Gopal argues that the United States actually caused the recent resurgence of the Taliban through its

ham-handed military approach.

A few years ago, a foreign policy blog put U.S. interests there in stark terms: "America, frankly, lucked out in Afghanistan. The 2001 attacks allowed America the moral ground to be in control of this vital strategic asset, this gateway between Central Asia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and India. . . . The question is whether the American mind is prepared to seize this chance the way China did with Tibet."

In fact, the American mind is badly divided on this amoral outlook, and on the use of war as "an instrument of national policy."

In his book, Davies uncovers our country's cognitive dissonance on the whole idea of the rule of law in war. The United States led efforts to shape international law—the Geneva Conventions, the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court—and yet we have also flouted that legal framework again and again.

The International Red Cross did a survey in seventeen countries on "the limits of what's permissible in war." The People on War Report found that Americans are much more accepting of attacks on civilians—at a rate of 42 percent, twice as high as other U.N. member nations. And Americans are more likely to believe that the Geneva Conventions have "no real relevance."

The reasons for this, Davies suggests, include our isolation from the realities of war, deliberately distorted media coverage and lack of education on war, and the corrosive effects of widespread covert action by our government. The rules just don't seem to apply to us.

It is also hard to look at what our country is doing. We'd rather not. And the mainstream media joins us in looking away from what it means to live in an empire that defends its very broadly defined "national interests" through a policy of mass murder. It can be overwhelming to even think about it.

But we can't pretend we are an island. And we can't begin to improve our broken immigration system without addressing what the United States does abroad. No one brings this home more vividly than Sonia Nazario, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* who wrote *Enrique's Journey*, about the migration of one Honduran child to the United States.

Nazario demonstrates how U.S. foreign policy in Honduras led directly to his plight.

Honduras is the original banana republic. Our government, working with the United Fruit Company, deliberately destabilized governments in Honduras and Guatemala, helped suppress social welfare programs and the labor movement there, and ensured that big corporations could maintain a lock on vast tracts of land without paying taxes. Now we see the result, as desperately poor people searching for opportunity migrate to our country. Instead of dealing with the root cause of the problem, we are turning to militarized borders and beefed-up policing to arrest them and send them back. This is insane.

But in the movements for immigrant rights, climate stability, and economic justice, we are seeing a broader public awareness of the way violence and greed are intertwined.

"As a whole, the world has made great strides toward peace," with a steady decline in conflict since the Cold War, Davies writes. Yet America continues to play a destabilizing role. "American militarism spreads chaos and undermines the framework of international law and cooperation."

His book has a moving chapter by a woman veteran who writes about overcoming the psychological wounds of a particular kind of disembodied, high-tech warfare. She accuses herself of mass murder. She suffers from a deep alienation for having been responsible for something she'd rather turn away from. But she is working for peace.

In this way, she is a lot like many of us as Americans.

In fiscal year 2015, military spending is projected to account for 54 percent of all federal discretionary spending. And despite reductions in military spending in 2010, overall the Pentagon budget is still up 45 percent since 9/11. Some analysts have suggested that Osama bin Laden, in attacking the United States, was pursuing a deliberate strategy by drawing our country into a disastrous and unwinnable war. "Having seen the Soviet Union decline in large part by bankrupting itself," through the arms race and getting bogged down in Afghanistan, "his objective was to wage *economic* war against the United States by drawing it into a similar conflict," Ezra Klein wrote in *The Washington Post*. If that is true, our country is doing nothing to defend itself.

Imagine what could be done by reducing the nearly $600 billion we plan to pour into the Pentagon this year. Just the $32 billion wasted on canceled weapons programs between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s was more than enough to cover free college tuition for a year for every student in America.

It's time to find some better instruments of national policy. ◆

Don't Blame the Muslims

A member of a self-described "patriot" group was shot while guarding a survivalist gun store in Oktaha, Oklahoma. The store, Save Yourself Survival and Tactical Gear, had drawn criticism and threats after putting up a sign declaring itself "MUSLIM FREE." The would-be protector was shot when his gun fell out of his holster and hit the ground. The sheriff told the Tulsa World *that the group's members did not appear to be knowledgeable about firearms safety.*

He's Not THAT Open-Minded

In late August, the Vatican scrambled to clarify that Pope Francis, in writing to thank and bless a lesbian publisher who sent him children's books that promote tolerance of gay families, did not mean to convey acceptance of her lifestyle. The blessing, said a papal spokesman, did not cover "any possible teachings that are not in line with the doctrine of the church on gender theory, which hasn't changed a bit, as the Holy Father has repeated even recently." You're welcome.

Neither Is This Guy

Representative Paul Gosar, Republican of Arizona, a self-described "proud Catholic," decided to boycott Pope Francis's visit to Congress to avoid hearing His Holiness go on about climate change, which, Gosar wrote in a letter, "is being presented to guilt people into leftist policies." He urged the Pope to devote himself to the planet, if he must, "in his personal time," adding, "If the Pope spoke out with moral authority against violent Islam, I would be there cheering him on."

Looking for Love (in All the Wrong Places)

From an article in *Time* magazine: "Less than 32 percent of the country has a favorable view of the Republican Party, including just 68 percent of people who call themselves Republicans."

Democracy Inaction

Randy Richardson, a candidate for school board in Riceville, Iowa, received a grand total of zero votes, despite being the only candidate for the seat he was seeking on the September 8 ballot. Asked by the Mason City *Globe Gazette* why he didn't vote for himself, Richardson explained, "I was too busy."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STUART GOLDENBERG

Readers are invited to submit No Comment items. Please send original links or clippings with the name and date of publication to editorial@progressive.org or 409 E. Main Street, Madison, WI 53703. Submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned.

More Room in Blue Jean Nation

Your article on Mike McCabe ("Blue Jeans, Big Dreams," September issue) seems to show McCabe dealing mostly with traditional political constituencies, dispirited as they are and happy to be entertained by a lively speaker. But what about smaller, angry groups such as teachers, family farmers being crowded out by large factory farms, small business owners who can't borrow money, Native Americans opposed to mining and pipelines, small towns being choked by frac sand mining dust, and minority/inner city unemployed and rural farm workers? There are probably many other groups that need to be listened to and helped to organize.

—Sven Midelfort
Madison, Wisconsin

A Plan for Syria

The situation in Syria is chaotic and desperate, and the United States alone is not in a position to implement a solution (Juan Cole interview, September issue). But a positive resolution to the Syrian disaster is possible and should be pursued.

First of all, Syria must be declared a "failed state." Surely any nation from which more than half the population flees death and destruction fits that definition. Then the United Nations becomes the custodian of civic responsibility. U.N. peacekeepers would be required to restore order.

With this re-establishment of civic order, a constitutional convention should be called, with participation of all the various factions of Syria, including those now in refugee camps. A new constitution needs to be drawn up and adopted. Elections under this constitution would create a new Syrian government which, as it assumes control, would permit the withdrawal of the United Nations.

U.N. peacekeepers must move into Syria as quickly as possible. Preliminary re-establishment of water, electric service, medical care, and education can begin.

This is a real and feasible solution to the tragedy now in Syria. We should work for its adoption.

—Carl Schwartz
Sammamish, Washington

Putting in a Good Word for Putin

The "No Comment" section in the September issue compared Donald Trump with Vladimir Putin, calling Putin a "fellow megalomaniac." What gives? What has Putin done to warrant that insult? He stopped Obama from bombing Syria. He has tried to save some of Ukraine that was historically Russian from going over to the United States and NATO. Obama deserves to be called a megalomaniac as he bombs, drones, engages in "regime changes," imposes sanctions, and threatens other countries.

Calling Putin names is peculiar

SLOWPOKE © Jen Sorensen

How to be a Republican "Feminist"
1. BORROW IDEAS FROM MOVEMENTS YOU DENOUNCE
WOMEN HEARD VERY CLEARLY WHAT YOU SAID.
NOT THAT I SUPPORT LEFT-LEANING IDEOLOGY.
2. SPREAD HORSESH!* ABOUT PLANNED PARENTHOOD TO SHOW YOU'RE A MAVERICK LADY
I SAW THE BRAINS BEING HARVESTED WITH MY OWN EYES.
3. PUT POOR WOMEN IN THEIR PLACE
AVOID STDs THROUGH WILLPOWER, BITCHES.
4. IF ALL ELSE FAILS, POSE WITH GUNS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY GIVING BIRTH TO OCTUPLETS
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
(PROP BABIES ARE OK!)
FOOMP!
FOOMP!
FOOMP!
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in a publication like yours. On Fox News, I expect such things, but not on your pages. When I read that comment, I was reminded how the U.S. media always calls leaders of perceived enemy countries "strongmen" and their governments are always "regimes."

—Don Scott
Calistoga, California

> From the Web

On "Ten Years After Katrina, New Orleans Is Failing Its Kids," by Ashana Bigard:

In Chicago, politicians use manufactured financial crises to privatize our school system and make their buddies more money. In New Orleans, the same players used another kind of avoidable crisis as their excuse.

—Laura Sabransky

On "The Battle over Education and Civil Rights," by Ruth Conniff:

A central folly of the misguided "test and punish" approach to education seems obvious. Schools most in need of more attention and more funding because they are "failing" are tested and then punished by draconian measures, including loss of funding. All schools must be adequately funded (not "equally" funded), and positive measures, not punishment, must be afforded to those most in need. Unfortunately, schools by themselves cannot solve the many problems that prevent students from scoring well on tests manufactured by profit-seeking individuals and companies. Schools, students, and teachers are a vital part of the nation's infrastructure.

—Doug Giebel

> From Facebook

On "Ed Schultz, Feeling the Bern, Publicly Endorses Bernie Sanders at Bob Fest 2015"

This is why I like Ed Schultz: He speaks for the workers and now supports a real winner in Bernie Sanders. #FeelTheBern

—Collin Beishir
Mehlville, Missouri

On "The Progressive Launches New Project to Defend Public Education: Progressive Education Fellows"

Happy to know Minneapolis is well represented. Thank you Sarah Lahm for all your work exposing the undermining of our public education system!

—Judy Reinke Bjorke

> From Twitter

On Fighting Bob Fest

@TheProgressive: Chris Taylor—we don't need a wall between US & Canada we need one between women and the Republican party #BobFest2015

@cr8f: So #FightingBobFest got #Scottwalker to quit.

@lizzwinstead: With Eliza Cussen of @NARALWI & State Rep Chris Taylor at #FightingBob. Today has been amazing! #ladypartsjustice

@JohnFugelsang: In Madison for @FightingBob2015 w/ @HightowerNews @KevinAGray @rconniff @NicholsUprising & @lizzwinstead. Great ppl.

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THE PROGRESSIVE MEDIA PROJECT

Why Ben Carson Resonates With the GOP

By Clarence Lusane

There is one candidate in the Republican presidential race who can potentially derail the Donald Trump Express, and it's not Jeb Bush. The Donald's dominance in the GOP primaries has obscured the equally amazing rise of Ben Carson.

Carson resonates with the same base of far-right Republican voters that Trump, Ted Cruz, and Mike Huckabee speak to, but he may have more staying power.

Carson speaks a language that is unwaveringly white and conservative—and his supporters understand this. Three-fourths of the Carson crowd knows for a "fact" that President Obama was not born in the United States or is not sure, according to a recent poll by Public Policy Polling. The numbers are even worse when it comes to Obama's religious beliefs. Only 1 percent—this is no typo—believes that he is a Christian.

Carson's perch at the top of the polls demonstrates that it is not just Trump's outsized celebrity, oversized ego, and unorthodox campaign that have the billionaire stealing the show. Carson's and Trump's anti-immigration and anti-welfare-state ideology animate GOP voters.

However, Trump continually presses the white resentment button that is highly problematic for a party that needs voters of color to have a chance of winning the presidential race. Carson provides a symbol of diversity without ever addressing issues of racial justice. ◆

The Progressive Media Project distributes Voices of Diversity op-eds. For more information, see www.progressivemediaproject.org.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SHAKEDOWN

Weaponized Generosity

by Cynthia Liu

On Sunday, September 20, the new Eli Broad museum opened in Los Angeles. Nearly a thousand parents, students, and teachers seized the occasion to march against the "philanthrocapitalist's" plan to groom 130,000 public school students in Los Angeles Unified School District to attend unregulated new charter schools.

Philanthrocapitalism describes a certain kind of "weaponized generosity" where donors offer their self-interested charitable giving to remedy the very lack they create elsewhere.

Eli Broad is the city's chief benefactor for numerous charities; his wealth comes from decades of real estate developments in the Midwest and Southern California and from the insurance industry. He has a particular interest in expanding charter schools in Los Angeles. He appears to invest a lot in the city of Los Angeles but when you look more closely, his giving defunds the public sector, and Broad ends up with the better part of the deal. For example, Broad originally wanted to lease the expensive downtown Los Angeles parcel the museum sits on for $1 a year over ninety-nine years. Said one county supervisor, "Instead of a project that generates sales and property taxes, we'll now have an art museum that generates no property or sales taxes, and Mr. Broad will get the land for free."

Broad also publicly backed California's Proposition 30, a ballot initiative that restored funding to schools after the devastation of the Great Recession, but in private donated money to defeat Prop 30 and impose a separate union-busting initiative. ◆

Public School Shakedown exposes school privatizers and unites public school advocates. For more information, see www.progressive.org.

Syrian Refugees' Human Rights Struggle—and Ours

Human Rights Watch has been on the ground, speaking with Syrian refugees as they flee through Europe. We advocate for governments to ensure that all migrants are treated with dignity. "This is a political challenge, requiring political leadership in response—not a question of capacity to absorb the recent immigrants," Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth says.

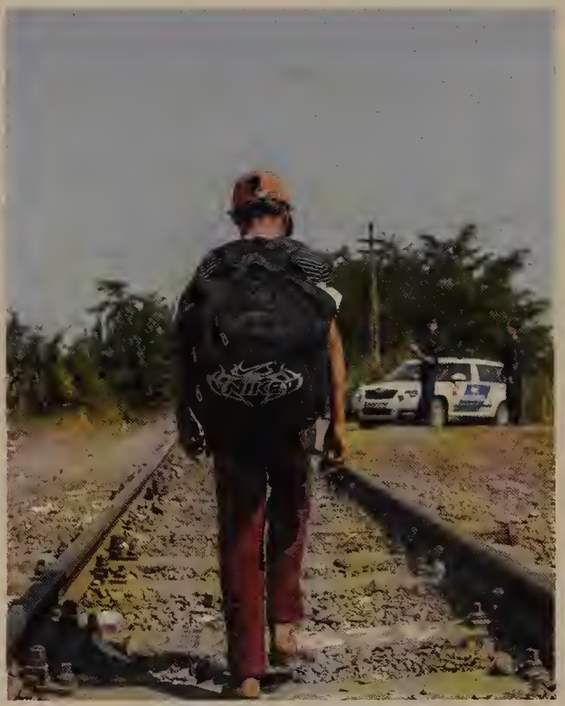
Mohammed, age thirty-one, his wife, and their three children fled from Damascus after the Syrian army stepped up its efforts to conscript fighting-age men. He said he is frightened to cross into Hungary from Serbia, fearing fingerprinting and detention by authorities.

ALL PHOTOS © 2015 DANIEL ETTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. CAPTIONS BY PETER BOUCKAERT AND DANIEL ETTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Hungarian police patrol the border in Röszke, Hungary. The Hungarian government put up the razor-wire fence in an effort to stem the flow of refugees and migrants into the country.

Refugees and asylum-seekers rest and wait for instructions near Röszke after crossing the Serbian-Hungarian border.

Refugees and asylum-seekers stand in line to be transferred to a detention camp near Röszke.



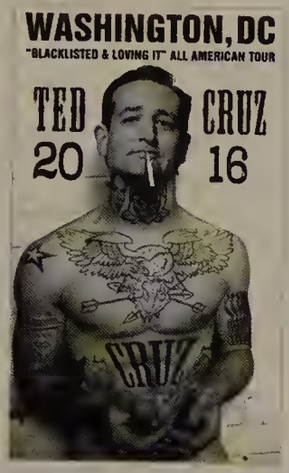
Hossein, a ten-year-old boy who fled Syria with his mother and his five siblings, walks on train tracks after crossing into Hungary. They are trying to reach his father, who arrived in Germany last year.

The Merchandising of the Presidency

Just about every candidate for president sells stuff, with proceeds benefiting the campaign. Here are some of the goods being offered.

Ted Cruz

Featured item: Bad-boy poster



Blacklisted & Loving It Poster

$50.00

Cruz also offers a coloring book titled "We 'C' Ted Cruz for President."

Jeb Bush

Featured item: Guacamole bowl

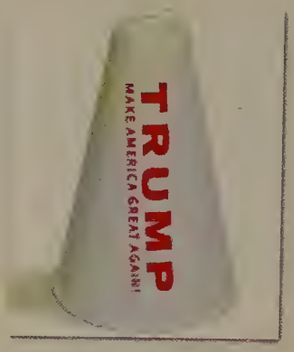
Guaca Bowle

$75.00

Jeb's reticence to use his last name is surpassed with this item, which doesn't bear any branding at all.

Donald Trump

Featured item: Mini megaphone



Trump for President Mini Megaphone - Red Imprint

$8.00

Trump also sells a variety of comb-over-friendly caps.

Marco Rubio

Featured item: "Water Great Nation" water bottle

"Water Great Nation" Marco Rubio Water Bottle (Pre-Order)

$30.00

ADD TO CART

Rubio is cashing in on a joke about his frequent public hydration.

Rand Paul

Featured item: Freedom socks

Freedom Socks

$15.00

Paul sells more than one hundred items, including car floor mats and a broken Hillary hard drive "with wiping cloth."

Bernie Sanders

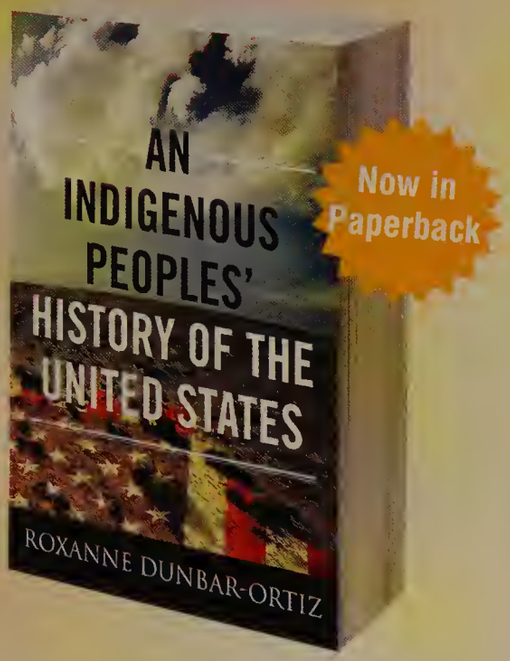
Featured item: Coffee mug

"CONTENTS MAY BERN"

$ 15.00

Sanders's coffee mug includes a warning.

Books to INSPIRE ACTION and CREATE CHANGE



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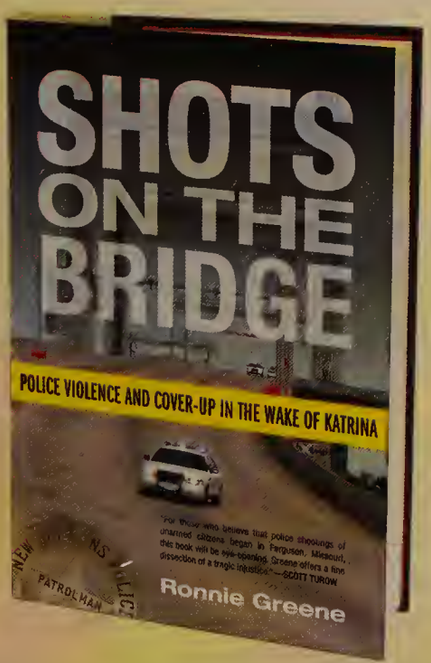

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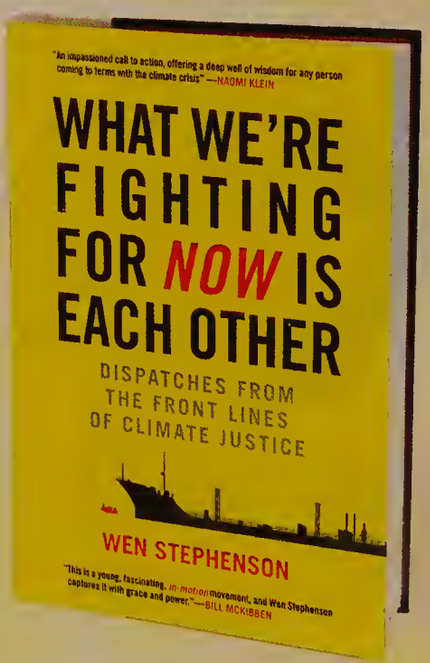

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Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis

After 14 years of U.S. occupation, Afghans are voting with their feet

By J. Malcolm Garcia

Jamshid Ahmady is planning a second attempt to flee Afghanistan.

KABUL—We sit in the shade near the shore of Qargha Lake in Kabul. The anemic shadows cast by thin trees point toward pitted paths where vendors sell fruit. On a road nearby, cars lurch through valleys of ruined pavement toward some distant hilltop destination.

"This is the only place for sightseeing in Kabul," says Jamshid Ahmady, twenty-eight. "We have this lake and the zoo. We don't have anything else to do in Kabul beside these two things—and avoid dying in a bomb blast."

Ahmady wears jeans, a button-down orange shirt, and shined leather shoes. He drinks Red Bull. He remembers the Taliban, but the memories do not weigh on him. What worries Ahmady now is the rising instability and lack of jobs. Like many other young Afghans, he plans to leave Afghanistan for Europe as soon as he can. He's already made one failed attempt.

"Escaping," Ahmady calls it. "Skipping out," others say. However they describe it, the modus operandi remains the same: talking to a smuggler and paying thousands of dollars to leave a country that has been mired in war for close to forty years, including fourteen since the United States invaded in the aftermath of 9/11.

J. Malcolm Garcia is the author of The Khaarijee: A Chronicle of Friendship and War in Kabul *(Beacon Press) and* What Wars Leave Behind: The Faceless and the Forgotten *(University of Missouri Press), and a recipient of the Studs Terkel Prize for writing about the working class and the Sigma Delta Chi Award for excellence in journalism.*

More than 40,000 Afghans have sought sanctuary in Europe from January until August of this year, according to the United Nations. Syrians comprised the largest group of refugees in Europe. Eritreans accounted for the second-largest number, and Afghans made up the third.

Many Afghans worry that the Afghan National Army, in the wake of the impending NATO troop withdrawal, will not have the capability to secure the country. In 2014, the last American commander to lead combat operations in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson, described the casualty rate among the Afghan army as unsustainable.

Afghan men and women who worked as interpreters for the United States and other allied forces are among those who want to leave. The Special Immigration Visa, a U.S. program designed to expedite the visa process for Afghan and Iraqi interpreters, entails a lengthy, and costly, application process. Translators and their families mired in the program's red tape risk retribution from the Taliban with each passing day.

Young Afghans today don't want to make the same mistake as their parents, many of whom stayed after the Russians left, and lived through civil war and the rise of the Taliban.

Despite assurances by the United States that NATO's departure will not be a repeat of the 1990s, many people here have concluded otherwise. They see a stubborn and increasingly powerful insurgency that refuses to accommodate Western interests and a weak unity government presided over by two former political rivals. The Taliban's takeover of the city of Kunduz has made a lot of Afghans even more nervous. Corruption runs rampant. Transparency International, an organization that tracks corruption worldwide, found Afghanistan to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world, alongside North Korea and Somalia.

The mounting problems have convinced many Afghans to follow NATO's lead and embark on their own withdrawal.

"Kabul is not safe," says Abdul Malik Bakhtyar, fifty-two, head of publications for the Ministry of Women. "So many men and women are leaving. We have had almost half a century of war but nothing has changed. It will only get worse if the country continues to deteriorate."

Bakhtyar lives in Logar province, about an hour's drive outside Kabul and an area with a strong Taliban presence. One night, he says, he saw the Taliban kill a policeman.

"They would do the same to me," he says. "Obviously, the Taliban would mind that I work with women."

Afghan women know firsthand about the threats they face. In March, Farkhunda Malikzada, a twenty-seven-year-old Afghan, was killed by a mob when she was falsely accused of burning the Koran. A woman I speak with, Gity Afshar, twenty-two, worries the same fate might await her.

"Either I sink in the sea or die in the sky, but I'm leaving," Afshar tells me.

Last January, she says, about a dozen men stopped her taxi and accused her of soliciting sex with the elderly driver. They threw stones and broke a window. She fled to a nearby bakery until the police arrived. No arrests were made.

Her father would not let her leave the house for two months, Afshar says. He told her that no man would be blamed should anything happen to her. Instead, she would be accused of not being a "good girl" and bring shame on the family.

"I was at home when Farkhunda was killed," Afshar says. "I started crying. I recalled my bad night. I saw my picture on the news instead of her. That is why I'm leaving."

As I write this, bomb blasts rock the capital and nearby provinces. My Afghan colleague Zabiullah Fazly, thirty-two, has started a Facebook group, "Afghanistan Security Alert," in which he documents the routine violence:

Kabul, September 8, at 2:15 p.m.: A magnetic bomb exploded and injured one police officer and destroyed a few vehicles in the area. It was attached to a car.

Kabul, September 11, at 5:15 p.m.: An explosion took place in Airport Residential Apartments.

Ghazni Province, September 14, at 10 a.m.: A group of armed men attacked Ghazni's prison, and almost 400 prisoners have escaped the jail.

Fazly worries about magnet bombs, explosive devices terrorists attach to vehicles. He inspects his car for the devices even in the Westernized shopping district of Share-Now, where billboards promote Mastercard and Visa credit cards. He, too, would like to leave Afghanistan. He has received death threats because he works with Westerners.

"I tell those guys, 'I am a poor man," Fazly says. "Shoot me now because I don't know when I'll have my next job, and I can't afford to leave.' "

In a country with an estimated 35 percent unemployment, many Afghans have quit looking for work and focus only on escaping.

"The middle class here is taking a hit," says Ahmad Shuja, a research associate for the Kabul office of Human Rights Watch. "Right now, unemployment and poverty are extremely high and going up. The figures are dire. You don't have bread lines here to photograph, but you can see the lines outside of the passport office."

Shekib Younissi, a flight attendant for Kam Air, an Afghan airline, recently made plans for his pregnant wife, two brothers, and father to leave Afghanistan. They will fly from Kabul to Tehran and stay with a cousin. There, they will pay a smuggler $24,000 to take them to Turkey. They will walk when necessary to avoid police stations and travel by car when they can. In Iran alone, they may have to walk up to twenty hours, Younissi says, before reaching the Turkish border. The trip from Turkey to Germany will cost an additional $20,000.

"My wife is seven months pregnant and with my first child," says Younissi, who will stay in Kabul to care for his sick mother. "I don't want my baby born here. Look, everyone is escaping. I don't want my child raised with bomb blasts."

His father, Mohammad Fayaz, fifty-seven, weeps when he speaks about leaving his wife of twenty-seven years.

"It is very difficult to part from your life partner and from your country," Fayaz says. "I have seen so much war. Before I stayed because it was my country, it was like my mother. But I can't see my family die here. Every time we see the news, the situation is worse here."

Younissi hopes to raise enough money in a year or two for him and his mother to join their family in Germany—if they make it.

"We have said to one another, 'Maybe we won't see each other again,' " Younissi says, recalling conversations with his wife. "We both cried. I try not to think of my wife and child dying doing this."

Gity Afshar: "Either I sink in the sea or die in the sky, but I'm leaving."

Jamshid Ahmady knows how it feels not to reach Europe.

He initiated his journey last November, making his plans through the most conventional of means: a Kabul travel agency. A sign in the window advertised visa applications for Turkey, Iran, Russia, and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, Ahmady says, such promotions often provide cover for travel agents to connect people with smugglers. A travel agent told him he knew a smuggler in Moscow. He'll sponsor you, the agent said. Ahmady paid the travel agent $1,500 and the Moscow smuggler $3,000. He bought a round-trip ticket to avoid arousing the suspicion of Russian customs officers.

Over a period of months, the Moscow smuggler filed the forms necessary to claim Ahmady as his cousin. Ahmady then applied for a Russian visa. He left for Moscow last November.

Ahmady spent his first night in Russia with the smuggler. The next day, the smuggler introduced him to another smuggler who, he said, could get him into Europe. But this smuggler told him he would have to wait six months until the snow cleared. The trip would take four or five days and cost $8,500.

After one week in Moscow, the first smuggler told Ahmady he could not stay with him any longer, and the second smuggler said he was sheltering so many refugees waiting to enter Europe that he had no room for him. Ahmady considered his options. He could not afford to stay in Moscow, and so he returned to Kabul. He intends to leave again as soon as he raises the money.

"Everyone here thinks of their own life and how to make it better," Ahmady says. "Nobody pays any attention to other people. The war makes people think only of themselves, of surviving. No one knows how long they will be alive. They leave for work, they don't know what will happen. You don't have a chance here. You're either not working or you're working but you could get killed in a bomb explosion."

He says he wants to feel free and walk free and not be afraid.

"That would mean a lot to me," he says.◆

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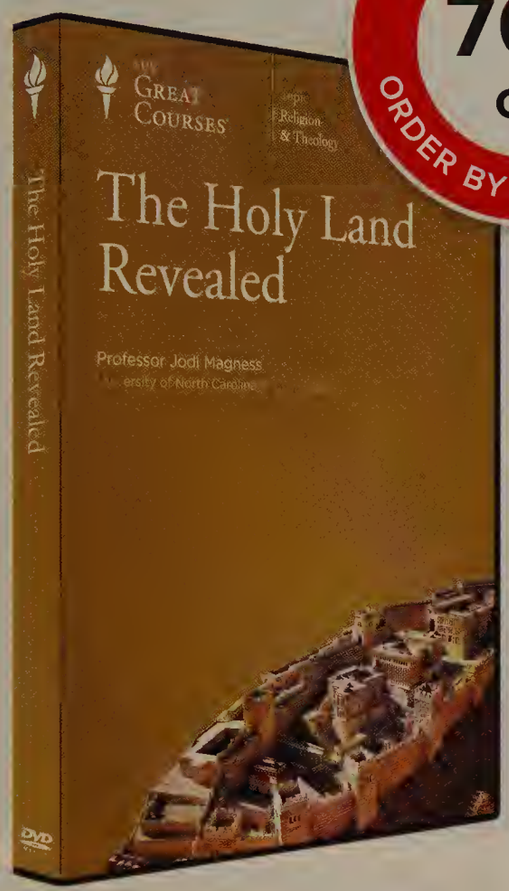

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Treated Like Enemies

The Crackdown on Egyptian Journalists

AP PHOTO/AMR NABIL

Canadian Al Jazeera English journalist Mohamed Fahmy listens to his verdict in a soundproof glass cage inside a makeshift courtroom in Tora prison in Cairo.

By Sharif Abdel Kouddous

CAIRO—Two years ago in December, Egyptian security forces raided the home of Baher Mohamed, a producer for Al Jazeera English, breaking down the doors of his apartment at dawn while he and his pregnant wife and two young children were sleeping. The family woke up to gunfire when police shot their dog. Mohamed was blindfolded and driven away. He would not return for more than a year.

Hours earlier, two of his colleagues, Peter Greste, an Australian correspondent for the channel, and Mohamed Fahmy, a dual Canadian-Egyptian citizen who was the acting Cairo bureau chief, were arrested at the Marriott hotel where they had been working.

In a climate of growing official repression of journalists in Egypt under President Abdel al-Fattah al-Sisi, the three were accused of belonging to or aiding a terrorist organization and spreading false news that endangered national security. Mohamed and Fahmy spent the first month of their detention in the maximum security wing of Egypt's notorious Tora prison complex, known as "Akrab"—Arabic for scorpion. They were held in solitary confinement twenty-four hours a day in insect-infested cells with no bed, books, shower, or sunlight before being transferred to another,

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Sharif Abdel Kouddous is a Cairo-based reporter. He is a correspondent for Democracy Now! *and a fellow at the Nation Institute.*

slightly better section of the jail.

Their trial, which human rights groups and the media denounced as comically flawed, was held in a converted lecture hall at the Police Institute within Tora's prison walls. Prosecution evidence included a song by musician Gotye, footage of trotting horses, and a press conference in Kenya.

Nevertheless, in June 2014, Judge Nagy Shehata returned a guilty verdict and sentenced the three journalists to seven years in prison. Mohamed received an extra three years for possession of a spent bullet casing, a souvenir from a work trip in Libya. Shehata added a trademark flourish, writing in his verdict that the journalists "were brought together by the Devil" to destabilize the country.

In a heart-wrenching moment after the ruling, Fahmy grabbed the mesh cage of the defendants dock and screamed for justice as courtroom guards hauled the three Al Jazeera journalists away. A number of correspondents covering the trial—some of whom were friends of the three journalists—openly wept in court.

The three men successfully appealed their case and were granted a retrial that began this past February. Greste was deported a few days before the retrial began. Presiding Judge Hassan Farid released Mohamed and Fahmy on bail on the condition they report to their local police station every day.

The arrest and prosecution of these Al Jazeera journalists became one of the most highly publicized cases in the world, helping to shine a spotlight on a vicious and unprecedented assault on press freedom in Egypt over the past two years. Journalists here are increasingly subject to arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, street violence, intimidation, state censorship, and a raft of draconian laws that have made it one of the riskiest places on Earth to work as a reporter.

"We are living through the worst state for press freedom and freedom of expression in this current period," said Mohamed Lotfy, executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms.

Lotfy's group released a report in August that documented more than 650 violations against journalists in the first year of Sisi's presidency, the equivalent of two violations a day.

"They are doing what they can at this current point in time to stop independent journalism," he said, sitting in his sparse office in Giza.

He smiled grimly and added, "In an ideal world for the current government, we shouldn't be having this interview in the first place. You shouldn't be working as a journalist, I shouldn't be working as a human rights defender, and, ideally, we should be in jail. If the state could get away with jailing both of us, they would do that."

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, eighteen journalists remain behind bars in Egypt. Egyptian rights groups put the number in the dozens. While the Al Jazeera case has received worldwide news coverage, local journalists who have borne the brunt of state repression have garnered far less attention.

Sitting with me in a crowded Cairo cafe in late August, the day before the conclusion of his retrial, Mohamed tried not to think about the prospect of returning to prison.

He spoke with an easygoing lilt while sipping a tall lemonade and tried to appear dispassionate about the fate that awaited him. But his incessant cigarette smoking and quickened mannerisms belied his efforts at nonchalance.

"In prison, you learn to kill your expectations and dreams. It's the only way to make it through," he said. "You just live day by day. So that's what I'm doing now, trying not to think about it."

Inside the courtroom the next day, Mohamed was visibly nervous. He had spent the evening before celebrating the first birthday of his youngest child, Haroun, who was born while he was in prison.

"I tried to sleep last night but I wasn't able to," he said. His large, owlish eyes scanned the courtroom packed with reporters. His brother, Assem, a cameraman with Sky News Arabia, was his only family member to gain access to the trial, through his press card. "Let's hope that we all go home today happy and start to plan for our lives."

Minutes later, Mohamed and Fahmy were ordered into the defendants cage to await their fate. They had both expressed cautious optimism that they would not be sent back to prison, instead getting a suspended sentence or credit for time served.

Egyptian officials had signaled they viewed the high-profile case as a nuisance causing unwarranted criticism of the Egyptian government. Following the initial guilty verdict, Sisi himself expressed disappointment at the ruling and said the sentences had "negative consequences."

When Farid read out his judgment,

an audible gasp rippled through the courtroom. He announced that the defendants were not journalists because they lacked the necessary credentials and sentenced them to three years in prison for spreading false news and broadcasting without a license. Mohamed got an extra six months for the spent bullet casing.

On his Twitter account after the verdict, Mohamed wrote: "Keep shouting for us, my colleagues. I'm sorry. From now on will not be able to keep in touch with you. #FreeAJStaff."

On September 23, Mohamed and Fahmy were among 100 prisoners to receive pardons by Sisi as part of a customary prisoner release on the eve of the Eid al-Adha holiday. The move came a day before the Egyptian president was scheduled to fly to New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly.

AP PHOTO/AMR NABIL

Al Jazeera English journalists Mohamed Fahmy, left, and Baher Mohamed, speak to reporters after a hearing in their retrial outside a courtroom of Tora prison in Cairo on June 1, 2015.

The state of Egypt has on numerous occasions made its hostility toward the media clear.

Brigadier General Mohamed Samir told the state-owned *Al-Ahram* newspaper in July that the army "was fighting two wars"—one against Islamic militants and one against the media. Meanwhile, in a speech at the Military Academy in Cairo in September, Sisi warned students that "the war of information and the psychological battle destroys countries."

Journalists have become among the primary victims of this mindset.

Abdullah al-Fakharany, the twenty-five-year-old executive director of the Rassd News Network website, was among three journalists arrested on August 25, 2013, and sentenced to life in prison this past April on charges of spreading chaos, spreading false information, and "forming an operations room to direct the Muslim Brotherhood to defy the government."

In an article from prison published online in August, Fakharany summed up the particularly harsh treatment of journalists in Egypt.

"Now, after spending two years in jail, and having been given a life sentence, I realize fully that detained journalists, under the present regime, are the most severely persecuted, punished, and deprived," he wrote. "They are denied all the basic rights to which a detainee is entitled and are denied a fair trial. This regime is simply treating us as enemies."

Ahmed Gamal Ziada, a photojournalist with the Yaqeen News Network, spent almost 500 days in prison on trumped-up charges, subject to routine abuse. The twenty-six-year-old was arrested on December 28, 2013, as he was covering clashes at Al-Azhar University. Police detained him while he was filming two students being viciously attacked by security forces.

Ziada was hauled off to a police station, where he was forced to walk through two rows of guards wielding batons, belts, and whips who beat detainees mercilessly. It's what's known as a "welcome party." He was eventually transferred to Abu Zaabal prison on the outskirts of Cairo along with seventy-five students arrested at the Al-Azhar protests. They faced a raft of charges, including assaulting police, vandalism, and illegal assembly. He languished in a cell packed with more than forty other detainees for sixteen months.

True to his trade, Ziada used his time in prison to document the harrowing conditions of his detention,

leaking articles that were published on online news outlets and social media. He described how masked guards with dogs would raid the cell, beating detainees and confiscating possessions, including blankets, clothes, books, and cigarettes. On one occasion, several prisoners collapsed when tear gas was used.

But nothing compared to the so-called "disciplinary cell" Ziada was sent to on three separate occasions, the longest of which was a full week. In a haunting letter titled, "The Graveyard of the Living" that was published on the website El Bedaia, he described the ordeal: "I entered the death chamber: a cell, three times five feet big, half a blanket, a rotten smelling plastic box to use as a toilet—since it is forbidden to open the cell throughout the duration of the punishment—a dirty bottle of water, a rotten loaf of bread and an equally rotten piece of cheese. No air, no light, no life!"

Ziada was punished for his writings with beatings, tighter limitations on visitation rights and restricted access to pens, paper, and books. After eight months in prison without trial, he went on the first of three hunger strikes to protest his detention. He persevered for ninety-eight days before breaking his fast, incurring health problems he continues to suffer from.

In April, he was finally acquitted and released. Now free, he remains determined to resume his work as a journalist.

"There is fear that I return to prison," he said, sitting in a lounge area at the Press Syndicate in downtown Cairo. He sported a scruffy beard and a shock of thick curly hair. "But I won't sit at home because I'm afraid of them. If that was the case, then no one would do any work and no one would write, no one would photograph or anything."

Ziada has emerged as a leading advocate for another journalist, Mahmoud Abou Zeid, better known as Shawkan, a freelance photographer who has been imprisoned for more than two years without trial. Amnesty International has designated him a "prisoner of conscience." The twenty-eight-year-old is in poor health, suffering from Hepatitis C, anemia, and low blood sugar.

Although they have never met, Ziada and Shawkan learned of each other through newspaper articles in prison. They began to send messages back and forth and eventually struck up a friendship.

In mid-August, Shawkan asked Ziada to publicly read a letter he penned to mark his 700th day in what he called "Tora cemetery."

Shawkan concluded the letter with a message to other photojournalists: "Fight for the sake of the photograph. We make history, not the historians. . . . Please do not put the camera down. No matter what, take pictures for my sake."

Two weeks later, the Free Shawkan campaign announced Shawkan was going on a hunger strike to protest his pretrial detention surpassing the maximum period of two years.

The Egyptian government denies that any journalists are in prison for doing their job. At a joint news conference in August with visiting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said, "None of the journalists . . . are in prison or facing a judicial process related to their professional journalism—but are accused of implication with terrorist activity or contravening stipulated legal norms."

Sitting beside him, Kerry offered some tepid criticism, saying the United States stood behind Egypt in its battle against terrorism but adding that freedom of speech, assembly, and peaceful political dissent must be allowed if Egypt is to successfully combat extremism.

In May, a congressionally mandated State Department report on Egypt found security forces "have committed arbitrary or otherwise unlawful killings," and that a series of decrees, new laws, and judicial actions restrict basic freedoms and "undermine the prospects of democratic governance."

Yet despite official acknowledgment of the Sisi regime's harsh crackdown, the Obama Administration has resumed formal security talks with Egypt for the first time in six years and restored full military aid.

Days before Kerry's visit, the United States delivered to Egypt eight F-16 warplanes, the first since lifting a weapons freeze in March. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo went so far as to brag about the shipment, posting a video of the jets flying over the capital on its official Twitter account, along with the Arabic hashtag "Long Live Egypt"—a phrase known primarily as the slogan from Sisi's presidential campaign.

There are growing fears of an even harsher clampdown by Egyptian authorities following the passage of anti-terrorism legislation signed by Sisi in August, the latest in a series of draconian measures enacted in the absence of a sitting parliament.

The new law contains sweeping

definitions and vague provisions that criminalize basic reporting. One article imposes heavy fines ranging from 200,000 to 500,000 Egyptian pounds (about $25,000 to $64,000) for issuing reports that contradict official accounts, a penalty that could force many of Egypt's cash-strapped news outlets to go bankrupt and close down.

The law also imposes a minimum of five years in prison for the "promotion, directly or indirectly, or any perpetration of terrorist crimes, verbally or in writing or by any other means"—loose definitions that rights advocates argue will be used to intimidate and imprison journalists.

Khaled Dawoud, a veteran journalist who has worked at the *Al-Ahram Weekly* for the past twenty-two years and serves as deputy editor-in-chief, said the legislation would result in greater self-censorship.

"Of course, I'm going to think twice now before reporting something," Dawoud said, sitting in the fake wood-paneled office of his newspaper. "We're journalists, it's a job. I'm not a hero, I don't want to go to prison."

State censorship is also on the rise. In a one-week span in August, three privately owned newspapers were prevented from going to print or into circulation because of content related to President Sisi. The order to halt the printing came from an unknown oversight body. Authorities went so far as to recall and shred freshly printed copies of one newspaper over a story about Sisi's visit to his mother while she was in hospital.

And in mid-September, Egypt banned news coverage of an attack by security forces that killed twelve people, including eight Mexican tourists and their guides. They were purportedly mistaken for insurgents.

"You have to put what is happening in a general framework: the censorship, the anti-terror law, the imprisonment of journalists—it's about controlling the overall space," said Khaled al-Balshy, head of the Freedoms Committee at the Press Syndicate. "This is the most dangerous problem of the general approach those in power are using: the idea to impose one voice, and the silencing of the many." ◆

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Nuclear Deal Gives Iranian Reformers Hope

Reformists rally in Tehran during 2005 presidential campaign.

By Reese Erlich

TEHRAN—Three students are standing outside the University of Tehran excitedly discussing the future of their country. Now that the United States and Iran have agreed on a nuclear accord, Iranians have high hopes for improving the economy.

"Trade will come back," says Iman Ahdeli, a twenty-two-year-old medical student. "We'll import and export more easily."

From the espresso bars of wealthy north Tehran to the poor sections of south Tehran, Iranians are cautiously optimistic that lifting sanctions will boost their ailing economy. Many also hope that political reforms will follow.

Iran's ruling elite has for decades been primarily divided into reformist and conservative camps. Both these trends support the Iranian constitution, which gives political power to religious leaders and severely curtails civil liberties. But the reformists seek an expansion of democratic rights within the system while conservatives fear such openings will undermine the Islamic state.

President Hassan Rouhani and his reformist supporters fought hard against the conservatives to reach the nuclear agreement, hoping that momentum will carry them to victory in Iran's February parliamentary elections and beyond.

But hardliners within the military, police, and judiciary are fighting back. Outspoken reformists have been arrested and harassed. And Iran's staunchly conservative supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, continues to make all important political and economic decisions.

So far the reformists are winning, according to Javad Etaat, an associate professor of political science at Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University. "The extremists think there should be no cooperation with the United States," he says.

Foreign correspondent Reese Erlich contributes regularly to The Progressive. *This article was supported by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.*

In mid-July, seven nations—the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran—signed an agreement in Vienna calling for strict inspection of Iran's nuclear power program in return for lifting economic sanctions. In September, the agreement went into effect when opponents in Congress failed to muster the votes to kill it.

Iranian negotiators agreed to let the International Atomic Energy Agency inspect the entire nuclear chain, from uranium mining through enrichment and disposal. Iran must allow inspection of military and research facilities, even those it says have no nuclear connection.

That angers Ruhollah Hosseinian, a leading conservative member of parliament, who argues that Western countries can use the agreement to undermine Iran's conventional arms program. "They can inspect what they want," he says.

And Hosseinian strongly opposes the ability of the United States and Western countries to reimpose sanctions without a United Nations vote.

"It's like a hammer above our head," he says. "This endangers investments. So no one is going to invest in Iran."

But the reformists hope that lifting sanctions, which could happen by early 2016, will further boost the economy and their popularity, adding to the setbacks experienced by the conservatives during the last few years of the administration of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad is the Donald Trump of Iran—a rightwing populist full of bluster and bravado. In 2009, millions of Iranians poured into the streets to protest fraudulent presidential elections and demand democratic rights. Some went much further than the reformist leaders by calling for a new constitution and secular rule. The regime cracked down viciously.

Even mainstream politicians weren't safe from the repression. The two main opposition presidential candidates in 2009, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, remain under house arrest for supporting the Arab Spring and calling for renewed demonstrations.

Ahmadinejad bragged that Iranians could ignore international sanctions but, in reality, they hurt. Iran had to severely cut back sales of oil, natural gas, and petrochemicals. Sanctions blocked all bank-wire transfers. Business costs rose sharply. The government deficit skyrocketed, and Tehran simply printed money to pay its debts. Inflation hit a high of 40 percent in 2013.

In the 2013 election, Iranians were fed up with Ahmadinejad's policies. Rouhani, a centrist candidate, won election in the first round of voting when reformists supported him at the last minute. The new government instituted a popular medical insurance program, reined in expenses, and reduced direct subsidies.

So far, the economic reforms are working. During the last year of Ahmadinejad's rule, the country's gross domestic product declined 7 percent. It is now growing at a 3 percent clip.

"For the next five to seven years, we need to concentrate on the local situation to rebuild our economy, which has suffered not only from sanctions but also because of mismanagement," explains Saeed Laylaz, an economist and prominent reformist who spent a year in jail in 2009. "We need at least ten years to rebuild the per capita gross domestic product."

But ordinary Iranians are expecting immediate economic improvements once sanctions are lifted, says Etaat. That could be a problem.

"It's a mistake by the government to lift expectations after the deal," he says. "It's also the people's mistake that they think everything will be solved."

Iran's problems go well beyond heightened expectations. It has one of the world's most complex and opaque systems of government. Iranians can vote but that doesn't mean the government follows the popular will.

Under Iran's constitution, majority opinion is constrained by a series of clerical institutions that supposedly provide Islamic guidance. The Guardian Council, made up of senior clerics, can overrule any law passed by parliament. It must approve all candidates running for president or parliament.

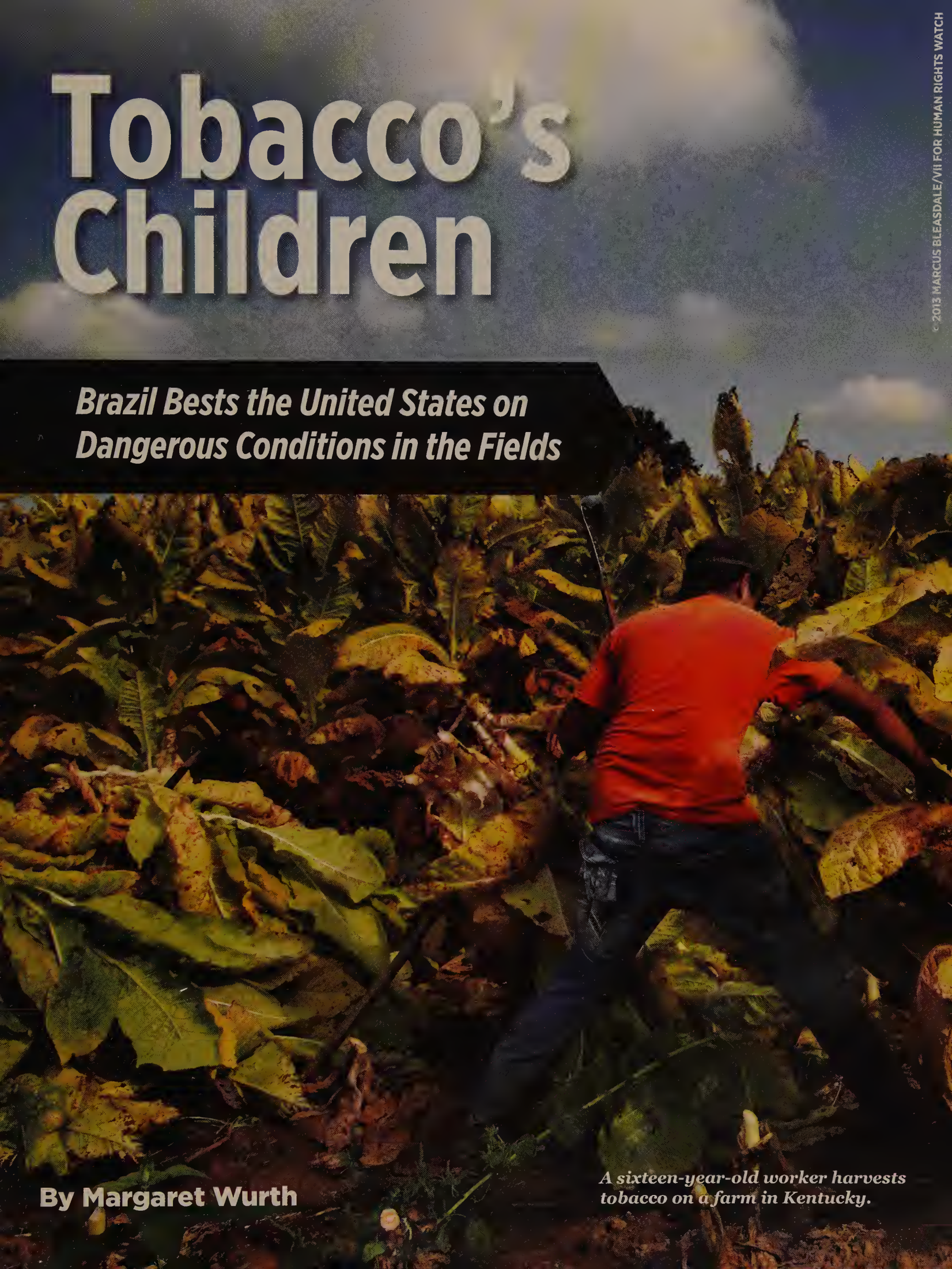
In the past the council has disqualified sitting members of parliament from seeking re-election because they became "un-Islamic." In 2013, the council even prohibited Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani from seeking the presidency, even though he was a former president and held a high position in government at the time.

The conservatives, who retain a majority in parliament, are likely to use such tricks to dominate next February's elections. They are still angry that President Rouhani negotiated the nuclear accord with the West. For them, the reformists gave away too much. But conservative leader Hosseinian concedes that if the economy continues to get better, the reformists will gain ground.

"If they can improve the quality of life for the people, definitely they will be the winners," he says grudgingly. ◆

Tobacco's Children

Brazil Bests the United States on Dangerous Conditions in the Fields



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A sixteen-year-old worker harvests tobacco on a farm in Kentucky.

By Margaret Wurth

On a warm January afternoon in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, Sandra, a forty-year-old tobacco farmer, dragged a lawn chair to a clearing in her front yard and motioned for me to sit. She was round-faced, with wispy blonde hair pulled into a messy ponytail, her skin creased from years of working in the sun.

"We've been growing tobacco since we were twelve or thirteen," she said, as her husband sat beside her. "Our parents planted tobacco."

I was two days into a month-long trip to investigate child labor in tobacco farming in Brazil, which in 2008 banned all work on the crop by children under eighteen. I had spent two years researching the issue in the United States, where children can legally be hired to work on tobacco farms at age twelve.

Both countries are among the top five global tobacco producers—Brazil is number two and the United States is number four. But the United States has no restrictions on children working in tobacco farming, despite known dangers including nicotine poisoning, pesticide exposure, heat illness, and injuries. I was curious to see how Brazil's ban was working.

Sandra—whose name has been changed to protect her privacy, as with others quoted in this article—plants a few hectares of tobacco each year and sells it to a multinational company that supplies tobacco leaf to the world's largest cigarette manufacturers. She and her husband do most of the work on the farm themselves. They have two children: a daughter in her midtwenties who moved away from home to go to college in a nearby city, and a fourteen-year-old son, Matteo, a tall boy with a square jaw and braces.

"Our daughter, when she lived here, she helped," Sandra told me. "She did everything, from the harvest to planting. She started helping when she was about fourteen." But Matteo claimed he does not do much work on the farm. "I help a little bit, but mostly I stay on the Internet," he said, smiling.

I was skeptical. I understood that farmers would be reluctant to talk about child labor with a foreigner who had arrived at their door unannounced, speaking through an interpreter. After what I'd seen in my research in the United States, I had a hard time believing that the strong, athletic boy slumped in a chair across from me sat at home on the computer while his parents worked long hours in the fields.

But the family insisted it was mindful of the new law. Sandra warned of penalties if their son was caught working, though she wasn't sure what the penalties would be. "They can take you to court," she said. "The company says there's no way children can work in tobacco farming." Sandra and her husband hire a few adult workers to help on the farm during the harvest.

I learned that Matteo, who attends the local high school and hopes to study microelectronics, does help on the farm in the summer, but not nearly as much as his older sister did. He takes water to his parents in the fields. He loads piles of brittle, dried tobacco leaves into a wooden crate to form bales that weigh more than 130 pounds. Every so often, he helps his parents harvest tobacco, picking the thick green leaves by hand and holding them under his arm. "I don't allow him to work when the leaves are wet," Sandra told me. "It can make him sick."

A year and a half earlier, I had interviewed a fourteen-year-old girl on a humid July morning as she prepared for a day of work on a tobacco farm in eastern North Carolina. It was her first week on the job, and she had gotten sick.

"My head started hurting, and I kind of felt like throwing up," she told me. The tobacco plants were dripping wet from dew and rain, and her clothes got soaked while she worked in fields. "I just go home in my wet clothes," she said.

Her symptoms are consistent with nicotine poisoning, an occupational health risk specific to tobacco farming. When tobacco is wet, and especially when the weather is warm and humid, nicotine dissolves in the

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moisture on the leaf's surface and can be absorbed through the skin. Common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, headaches, and dizziness, and children are affected more severely than adults.

In our research in the United States, my colleague and I interviewed more than 140 child workers, most of whom had started working at age twelve or thirteen. Two-thirds reported symptoms of nicotine poisoning. Most had never been told anything about the illness by their employers, though some knew their symptoms were linked to working in wet conditions.

But Sandra knew about nicotine poisoning, or "green leaf sickness," as it's called in Brazil. A tobacco company instructor came to the farm to give the family health and safety information about nicotine and pesticide exposure, as well as Brazil's child labor restrictions. He warned them not to harvest when the tobacco was wet, and to wear the protective gear provided by the company at a cost to the family. The gear she described—water-resistant pants and a long-sleeved jacket with air vents in the back—was hot and uncomfortable, but it helped her stay dry when the fields were wet.

The child tobacco workers I interviewed in the United States received no protective equipment. Most brought plastic garbage bags from home, poked holes for their heads and arms, and pulled them on to try—often unsuccessfully—to keep their clothes dry.

Sandra and her husband also received a separate set of equipment for applying pesticides, including a mask. Tobacco production in Brazil—as in the United States—involves applying a range of toxic chemicals at various stages in the season. Sandra's husband had taken a pesticide safety course offered by the company two years earlier. "It helped me realize I was doing it wrong," he said. When I asked if anyone in the family had gotten sick after working with the pesticides, they shook their heads.

The children I had interviewed in the United States had not been given any pesticide safety training, and more than half reported seeing tractors spraying pesticides in fields near where they were working. They said they could taste and feel the spray drift over them. They said it made their eyes and skin burn, and caused them to vomit, feel dizzy, and have trouble breathing.

Children are especially vulnerable to harm from pesticides because their bodies and brains are still developing. The long-term effects of childhood pesticide exposure can include cancer, problems with learning and cognition, and reproductive health issues.

Over the next three weeks, I interviewed almost eighty farming families in Brazil's three largest tobacco-growing states: Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul.

Like Sandra and her husband, they were small-scale growers, selling to one—or sometimes several—Brazilian or multinational tobacco companies. They greeted me with the same warm hospitality, spreading lawn chairs in their front yards and passing around a traditional communal cup of steaming chimarrão, a kind of tea. Even though the farmers sold to a dozen different tobacco companies, their experiences were remarkably similar.

All of them knew that children under eighteen are prohibited from work in tobacco farming. Most families said their farms had not been inspected by government officials and could not describe the specific consequences of a child labor violation, but they feared the penalties just the same.

"If someone from the company came out, and we had our fourteen-year-old son out in tobacco, it would be very difficult for us," a lean fifty-year-old farmer I met in Rio Grande do Sul told me.

Ministry of Labor and Employment officials I interviewed told me their offices are understaffed; they don't have enough inspectors to enforce labor laws consistently and effectively. But the families I interviewed saw the threat of punishment as real, and it prompted them to change how their children worked on farms.

Some parents also understood that tobacco farming had health consequences, and didn't want their children exposed to the work. Beatriz, a fifty-two-year-old farmer in Paraná, had an uneven gait, and suffered from chronic leg and back pain and kidney problems, which she attributed to years of work in the fields. She said she hallucinates and gets dizzy when harvesting tobacco.

"They say it's because of the nicotine that goes through the skin," Beatriz told me. Although she was among the poorest farmers I met, she chose to hire workers rather than send her seventeen-year-old daughter to the fields. "I don't let her do it," she said. "I grew up working in tobacco, and now I have health

problems." Many other families told me they hired workers during the harvest, or swapped work days with neighbors and family members on other farms, rather than risk using their children.

Several farmers showed me the contracts they signed with tobacco companies, which included clauses about the child labor ban. Some families said company instructors checked with teachers and principals to verify children's school attendance.

They wore the same water-resistant suits and pesticide safety gear that Sandra's family had, and had the same colorful booklets with smiling tobacco farmers happily harvesting green leaves and spraying pesticides while wearing company-furnished protective equipment. The uniformity was striking, across all three states, from families living near urban areas to those in remote towns.

In the United States, I had interviewed dozens of children working fifty or sixty hours a week as hired laborers on tobacco farms. I saw them get drenched while working in wet tobacco fields with nothing but plastic trash bags to protect them from the nicotine and pesticide residues seeping into their skin. They described searing headaches, sudden vomiting, and dizziness that lasted all through the night.

The contrast between Brazil and the United States was stark and overwhelming.

Child labor has not been completely eliminated on Brazil's tobacco farms. Children still work in the tobacco fields, driven there by economic duress, as in the United States.

Workers, including a seventeen-year-old boy, stand on narrow rafters while hanging tobacco to dry in a barn in Kentucky. Many workers reported having difficulty breathing while hanging tobacco in curing barns or handling dried tobacco.

Rural poverty remains a problem in many parts of Brazil, and many farmworker advocates are concerned about what they see as unfair practices by large tobacco companies. Farm families are not guaranteed minimum earnings. The companies determine both the price of the agricultural inputs—seeds, pesticides, and other supplies, which farmers are required to buy from the companies—as well as the price and classification of the tobacco leaf once it's harvested. Small farmers have little control or room to negotiate.

"It's a yearly battle," a thirty-two-year-old farmer in Santa Catarina told me. Many farmers carried debts with the companies through the season and paid them off after the harvest. Sometimes, even then, they came up short.

But progress is being made on helping families understand the health hazards of the work, especially for children. This did not happen overnight. Some parents grumbled about how children would never learn to work if they were kept out of the fields until they were eighteen.

Amelia, a sixty-three-year-old grandmother in Paraná, framed it as a question: "You know what happens to children who don't work? They become drunks." A man in his midsixties in Santa Catarina gestured to his thirty-eight-year-old daughter and her thirty-five-year-old husband, who both worked as children, and said, "See? They didn't die. They're still here."

Ultimately, though, the strict regulation and penalties pushed people to end or limit their children's work

on the farm. No such constraints are keeping kids out of the tobacco fields in the United States. Here, the child labor provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act—the federal law governing the employment of children—treat agricultural work differently from work in all other sectors.

Children of any age can work on small farms with parental permission. Children can be hired at age twelve to work on a farm of any size, for unlimited hours outside of school—day or night—provided they have written parental consent or work on a farm where a parent is employed.

In all other employment sectors, sixteen is the minimum age for most jobs, and younger children can work only in certain jobs for limited hours. At sixteen, children working in agriculture can do jobs deemed "particularly hazardous" by the U.S. Secretary of Labor, while children in all other sectors have to be eighteen to do hazardous work.

For years my colleagues at Human Rights Watch and other children's advocates pushed for a bill in Congress to provide child farmworkers with the same protections as workers in other sectors, but the bill was never brought to a vote.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor introduced regulations that would have updated the decades-old list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children under sixteen working in agriculture, and banned all work by these children in tobacco farming. The proposal was withdrawn after it drew opposition from agricultural interest groups.

Prohibiting children under eighteen from working with a crop as toxic as tobacco may not sound like a radical notion. In most of the country, a person must be eighteen to buy a pack of cigarettes legally; California and New York City have raised this to twenty-one.

Yet on the day in May 2014 that we published our report, a tobacco company spokesman was quoted by the Associated Press as saying that banning children from tobacco work "is really contrary to a lot of the current practices that are in place in the U.S. and is at odds in these communities where family farming is really a way of life."

Since we published our report, some tobacco companies and tobacco growers' associations have adopted new child labor policies, or strengthened their existing policies. Now, most major players in the U.S. tobacco industry agree that children under sixteen should not be hired to work in tobacco farming. It's an important step, but it still means sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are in U.S. tobacco fields doing work that could make them sick.

The U.S. government has been reluctant to revisit the regulations issue. In April, bills were introduced in both the Senate and the House to ban children under eighteen from hazardous work on U.S. tobacco farms, but prospects are dim for legislative change in the current Congress.

With only incremental changes made toward eliminating child labor in tobacco farming in the United States, it is heartening to know that Brazilian tobacco farmers who were raised working in the fields are now thinking differently about child labor. The United States should take note of the example being set by its neighbor to the south. ◆

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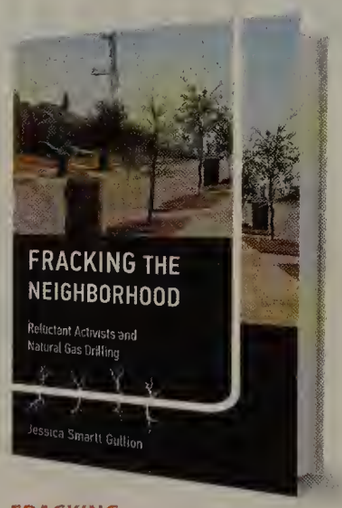

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Newark's Fight for Local School Control

By Rebecca Nathanson

On a sunny Wednesday morning at the start of the 2014-2015 school year, seven teenagers sat cross-legged in a line across Broad Street in Newark, New Jersey. PVC pipes locked them to one another, forcing the police to close the road for about eight hours. Behind them stood a crowd of their peers; in front of them, a series of banners.

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The teenagers were members of the Newark Student Union, a high school student union formed in 2012, and the banners illustrated their protest's goals. A small one said, "Cami Must Go," a reference to then-district Superintendent Cami Anderson. A much larger one read, "Full Local Control," with the word "Full" in bright red letters.

At the time, the students' demands seemed like a long shot. The state has run the Newark Public Schools since 1995, when it took over the district, citing poor student performance despite high spending per pupil.

"It could be a quick process if the state wanted it to be. But, unfortunately, the law isn't really explicit about those timelines."

In 1987, New Jersey became the first state to pass a law allowing state takeovers of underperforming public school districts. Twenty-eight other states have since followed New Jersey's lead, creating their own versions of state takeover laws.

Newark was the third district to be taken over by the state, after Jersey City in 1989 and Paterson in 1991. The state's law provided no details on how local districts could reclaim control.

In 2011, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie appointed a new superintendent. He selected Anderson, a former executive director of Teach for America who had previously been the senior superintendent of New York City's alternative schools. Cory Booker, then Newark's mayor and now a New Jersey Senator, supported this decision.

Christie and Booker had already hatched a plan to drastically remake Newark's school system and turn the city into a model for large urban school districts across the country. They unveiled their plan on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2010. They brought along Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who announced that he was donating $100 million to support their efforts.

This collaboration is recounted in *The Prize: Who's in Charge of America's Schools?*, a new book by Dale Russakoff, a former *Washington Post* reporter. As Russakoff recently reflected on National Public Radio, the goal was to dramatically expand charter schools and use evaluations to get rid of bad teachers and reward the good ones.

"Mark Zuckerberg's intent was to go to more and more cities with this model and use his philanthropy to basically solve the urban education crisis," Russakoff said. "He's not trying to do that anymore."

Last fall, Anderson created "One Newark," a far-reaching school restructuring plan that dissolved the city's long-standing neighborhood school system and enacted "universal enrollment," which places students at schools throughout the city. Its implementation was fraught with errors, contributing to local communities' distaste for Anderson.

One week into the 2014-2015 school year, families spoke of students still not assigned to schools, siblings placed in different schools, and unreliable transportation options for young children who now needed to traverse the city to reach their kindergarten classes. The plan also closed or re-sited some schools and converted others into publicly funded, privately run charter schools.

At the protest last September, students and parents were united in their opposition to One Newark, Anderson, and the state takeover that made it all possible. But while Anderson lacked the support of the city's new mayor, Ras Baraka, she still retained that of Governor Christie, who showed no sign of bowing to community pressure. The schools were under state control, and that was all that mattered.

That intransigence dissolved in a matter of days this summer. Cami Anderson resigned on June 22, eight months before her contract was due to expire. Four days later, Christie and Baraka issued a joint announcement: They were creating the Newark Educational Success Board, tasked with developing a clear path and timeline to returning the Newark schools to local control.

In July, the New Jersey Board of Education approved Chris Cerf, the former state education commissioner who first hired Anderson and a one-time member of the board of directors of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, as the city's new superintendent. He now serves on the Educational Success Board, along with four other Christie appointees and four people chosen by Mayor Baraka.

These developments came as a shock to many people in Newark, who are still parsing what it means.

"They're doing it because there is pressure to show that they're

doing something," says Trina Scordo, executive director of New Jersey Communities United, a grassroots community organization. "Now, having said that, the onus is on us to keep pushing it so that it's not just some board that gets set up out of a friendly political deal so that the governor gets to say, 'Hey, I was able to do this in Newark.' None of that is lost on us."

Scordo's mix of optimism and skepticism mirrors that of students and parents.

"I think there are a lot of people in the committee that really want this to pull through," says high school senior José Leonardo, president of the Newark Student Union and one of Baraka's appointees to the new state board. But, he continues, "There are a lot of questions that still need to be answered as to where we're going."

Among those unanswered questions: How, exactly, does the school district return to local control?

In 2005, the New Jersey state legislature adopted a law aimed at providing a more holistic way of monitoring school-district performance. That law specified that a district is ready to return to local control when it reaches a score of 80 out of 100 on an evaluation of five school functions: instruction and program, operations, governance, personnel, and fiscal management. However, the state education commissioner still has some discretion to decide exactly when that happens.

"It could be a quick process if the state wanted it to be," says Theresa Luhm, managing director of the Education Law Center, a New Jersey advocacy group. "But, unfortunately, the law isn't really explicit about those timelines."

Newark reached the eighty-point threshold for operations in 2007 and fiscal management in 2014, and those areas were put back into the hands of the Newark School Advisory Board. But without local control of governance, the state-appointed superintendent can overrule any decisions that the elected advisory board makes, rendering it symbolic even in the areas where it has met the requirements for local control.

As public schools become private and resources dry up, the restorative power of local control could be weakening, but it still means a greater sense of community control and local input.

Public school systems operate under state control in cities including Philadelphia, Detroit, and New Orleans. In each, a discussion about returning to local control is now taking place. Every city faces a different situation—a different reason for the initial takeover, a different process for determining when the city can regain control—but the underlying debates are the same.

Pennsylvania took over the Philadelphia school system in 2001, creating the School Reform Commission to run the district, which was in the midst of a fiscal crisis. This past May, voters approved a nonbinding ballot question asking to dissolve the commission and return the schools to local control.

In Detroit, the state first took over the public schools in 1999, only to return them to the city in 2005. Since 2009, however, a state-appointed emergency manager has run the district. Its financial situation has only worsened under state management as the city has faced the realities of bankruptcy. It had a $238 million deficit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015.

By next summer, officials predict the Detroit district could have an accumulated deficit of more than $335 million. In April, Michigan's governor suggested splitting the district into two entities: one that would pay off the debt and one that would educate students. The proposal includes appointing a school board that would eventually transition into an elected board, although the state would still oversee the system's finances until its debt is paid off.

New Orleans presents a more peculiar situation. In 2003, Louisiana allowed the state to remove schools deemed "failing" from the control of the city's Orleans Parish School Board and place them under state control. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the state made this easier to do, taking over 107 schools in the process. Each has since been either closed or converted to a charter school, making New Orleans the nation's first all-charter district.

A bill requiring the state to return schools that are no longer failing to the Orleans Parish School Board was approved by the Louisiana House Education Committee in March, but failed to pass the full legislature.

In Newark, where a majority of students still attend district schools, a return to local control after two decades will have a tangible impact.

"Our community knows what's best for our community," says student Leonardo. "We've had people come in and out and with all these plans and things, and they always fall through. Until we have the right to really fix this problem, the problem's just going to continue, and we're at a point where we can't wait anymore."

And yet, local control itself will not solve the city's array of education troubles: school closings, budget cuts, and an increasing percentage of children enrolling in charter schools. With money following students, this trend means public funding flows into charters while district schools face ever-declining resources. An elected school board with governance powers can only go so far when facing down a budget deficit of $15 to $20 million.

"My main question is what good is local control if we can't have public schools, neighborhood schools, that are still open to govern?" asks Tanaisa Brown, a high school senior and vice-president of the Newark Student Union. "So we still shouldn't lose focus on what's going on in the current scenario, what's going on every day in Newark public schools, how kids still need resources."

Veronica Branch, a parent of two Newark public school students, echoes Brown's concerns. "People are under the impression that if we get local control, we'll be able to do whatever we want and run the schools how we want," she says. "That's not necessarily true." The district still needs funding "to restore a lot of the things that we lost."

As for the city's ballooning charter school industry, it's less certain that local control will have any impact on it at all.

"The school district has no say over the charter schools anyway," says Russakoff. "It's almost like you have two completely separately operating districts who answer to different masters in the same city. So charter schools answer to the state, and they can only be chartered or have their charter revoked by the state. The only thing the district can do is to make the district schools attractive enough with services that are meaningful enough to the kids and the people in the neighborhood, I think, to maybe slow the exodus of kids to charters."

As public schools become private and resources dry up, the restorative power of local control could be weakening, but it still means a greater sense of community control and local input. And for some, its importance is less in its tangible effects than its political ones.

"Local control and democratic control over our public schools is not a radical idea. It's not a militant idea. In fact, it's really the gold standard for most school districts around the country," says Paul Karr, a spokesman for New Jersey Communities United. "Where we see that's not the standard, they're largely in urban communities of color. And so, by demanding local control, all we're looking to do is to exercise our basic right that most other communities have over their schools: the resources, the curriculum, the direction, the vision." ◆

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'A Mood of Resistance Has Opened Up'

An Interview with Kshama Sawant

By John Nichols

Kshama Sawant may well be the best-known city council member in America. There are reasons for this. She is outspoken, and she has no fear of stirring controversy. But the veteran of the Occupy movement who was elected to the Seattle City Council two years ago is something else: She is a proud socialist who makes no apologies for her ideology. She rejects the constrained language and the constrained strategies peddled by political and media elites, declaring that "calling myself as a candidate a socialist has never been a barrier."

Sawant has garnered attention far beyond Seattle, especially as she has worked to make the movement politics of the streets a basis for public policy, including Seattle's groundbreaking $15-an-hour minimum wage ordinance and a fight for rent control in one of America's costliest metropolitan areas. Once dismissed as an outsider who could not drive the agenda, she is now praised by veteran progressives, including Seattle council member Nick Licata, who says, "Kshama has made things happen that never would have happened before."

John Nichols is the Washington correspondent of The Nation *and associate editor of* The Capital Times *in Madison, Wisconsin. A new edition of his book* The S Word: A Short History of an American Tradition *has just been published.*

Sawant, who is seeking re-election on November 3, spoke with *The Progressive* about her activism, her frustration with the Democratic and Republican parties, the presidential campaign of democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, and her sense that a new movement-based electoral politics is spreading in the United States and around the world.

Q: Jeremy Corbyn has won the leadership of the British Labour Party, Syriza just won again in Greece, Podemos is rising in Spain, Ireland is seeing mass protests, we have all sorts of radical politics developing in Latin America and South Africa, Bernie Sanders is shaking up the presidential race, and a socialist is a member of the city council in a major American city. It seems as if socialist and social-democratic movements are kicking up all over. Why is this happening now?

Kshama Sawant: I think what's happening right now globally is that a mood of resistance has opened up. The persistent conditions of misery and economic deprivation, social inequality, racial injustice (or, if you're in India, caste injustice): These are ills that extend from a class system like capitalism.

Human beings have an amazing resilience, an amazing capacity to absorb harsh conditions. But then there are certain factors that come together, that catalyze conditions for people to move into struggle. In the sixties and seventies, you saw a period of struggle. In the thirties and forties, you saw the labor movement really coming into its own and winning a lot of the social reforms that we might have taken for granted until a little while ago.

What we see happening now is a good example of what I'm talking about. The severe economic recession, the great recession that started unfolding in 2008, was such a huge setback for working families everywhere. There was just utter devastation in terms of the economic life of a large majority of people.

There has been a recovery; people can see growth, even if it has been anemic. But that recovery hasn't been shared with the majority of us and that is what is propelling young people out onto the streets because there is an anger, and outrage. That's what is making young people angry, and moving them into action in the United States. You see something similar in England, as well. Jeremy Corbyn's phenomenal victory as leader of the Labour Party reflects the complete rejection of austerity.

Q: Austerity really does seem to be driving this. Austerity heightens the pain of a recession by imposing sacrifice. Is it that people are left with no choice but to push back?

Sawant: Exactly. There is absolutely no choice. People have to push back. When you talk about enforced sacrifice, there is what I call "chicanery." When the recession happened, public-sector unions employed by the city of Seattle, for example, were told that there had to be shared sacrifice. What the labor unions did, in good faith, was they accepted furloughs, they accepted pay freezes, they accepted a freeze on cost-of-living increases because it was all about shared sacrifice.

Now, it's years later, Seattle is a booming city. But unless we have an organized fightback, a social fightback, there's no prospect of workers recovering from those pay freezes, from the losses they suffered at that time. People realize this, and I think that's one of the reasons you are seeing so much organizing, so many new movements and new demands.

Q: Perhaps because of social media, we're seeing people in different places recognize and support the struggles of others. People in Seattle are cheering on Jeremy Corbyn. People in Ireland are cheering on Kshama Sawant. Are people more aware of struggles taking place around the world, and more engaged with them?

Sawant: You're definitely right that we are connected. We are connected internationally. I'm very pleased at that connection because, truly, national boundaries obscure the real connections. We have deeper connections with working people in Ireland and South Africa than we do with the elites in the United States, even though they may be geographically closer to us.

I think you're right that social media does have a lot to do with it. But there's more going on. I would say that in every period of social movement there has been that infectious effect, no matter what the level of technology for communication. If you look back on what happened, say,

in the sixties and seventies in American history, it was a time when the Black Power movement was blossoming, the women's rights movement, the Native rights movements, and later the anti-Vietnam War era that was a fundamentally transformative catalyst for so many movements.

Ultimately, there is no replacement, no matter what era we're talking about, for organizing. I don't mean just hard work. It's also developing a real sense of tactics and strategies, developing ideas for how to build nonsectarian movements that can broaden themselves for the maximum benefit without sacrificing the ideas that we need to propel the movement to the next level.

Q: What sort of tactics and strategies?

Sawant: What I mean is this: We don't hide that we're Marxists and socialists. But we don't say that you have to absolutely adhere to our ideas and only then will we fight (in solidarity) with you. We are absolutely on the ground, fighting alongside everybody.

We use our Marxist history to develop tactics and strategies, which you can see in the last two years have been tremendously effective. What I'm saying is that, in addition to social media, as movements develop, we have to develop those tactics and strategies. We also have to understand that this is not just about having a nonprofit job for making social change.

Making social change requires us to be activists at heart, organizers at heart. No matter what job you're doing, at the end of the day if you're not an activist we won't be able to accomplish much.

Q: One of the interesting things about the tactics and strategies you have embraced is the level of engagement with electoral politics and to win positions of power. There's a real focus on linking nonelectoral and electoral organizing to create stronger movements.

Sawant: That's very true. I think our victory has been—and, if we win this re-election, even more so—a message of genuine hope. It's not an empty message of faux hope, as we get from the Democratic Party establishment, but a hope based on an understanding that we can play a decisive role in our own future. The way we do that is not by working on our own individual careers but by building a collective movement and fighting for broad-based rights.

Showing that a left agenda, or a working-class agenda, can achieve a position of power in itself is empowering. Of course, we have to aim much higher. One socialist city council position in one metropolitan area is hardly going to be enough. We have a long row to hoe. But it shows you that you can achieve that position of power; you can win that election on a principled basis, without any shady compromises, without taking a penny from corporations. We never minced words; we were bold, we were calling out the failures of the establishment of Seattle at every step of the way.

We kept fighting, kept working with the movements. We won the $15-an-hour measure in Seattle, with a unanimous vote. And it has gone on to blossom into a nationwide movement. I can't imagine a much bigger piece of evidence that left politics can work.

Q: Part of what works involves thinking about how to stand up to the powerful while at the same time building coalitions. How does that work?

Sawant: I don't compromise with the Chamber of Commerce or the restaurant association or Walmart or amazon.com or Starbucks. But we do recognize that there are times when we may have to compromise in order to achieve meaningful social change. We have to compromise in every situation in life, as a matter of fact. But we compromise on the basis of what our movement is powerful enough to achieve at that moment. At every step, our concern is not: "Oh, what is going to be acceptable to big business?" Instead, the question we ask at every step of the way is: "What are we able to build at this moment and win at this moment?" [We do this by] going to where our power lies, which is with the working class—not with the ruling elite.

Winning elections by being part of a movement, and then carrying on in the elected office as part of the movement: That's what we are presenting. And that's the alternative to corporate politics that we are need.

Q: What do you make of what Bernie Sanders is doing on the national level? Do you see the success so far of Sanders, running as a democratic socialist, as evidence of something fundamental changing in our politics?

Sawant: The electric response to the Bernie Sanders campaign is an example on a much larger scale of the moment we are in. What is that electric response to? It is to an electrifying message. When Bernie Sanders launched his campaign, he said that this is about building a political revolution against the billionaire class.

Imagine the impact it has on the psyche of the American working class—which has been hungry for decades for any sort of alternative to corporate politics, even a mild one—and here you have a man who is saying we need to build a political revolution against a billionaire class. Those words capture the raw, deep-seated anger against billionaires and hedge-fund owners that we know exists in society. It offers up a version of what could be an alternative to corporate politics, which we all agree is needed.

Q: But would you have preferred that Sanders run as an independent?

Sawant: This is a very serious issue for all of us. There is much about the message of the Sanders campaign that we agree with. We agree that we have to build a political revolution against the billionaire class. He is calling for a $15 minimum wage federally. He is talking about eliminating student debt. He is talking about many, many things that people think are urgently required: single-payer health care and so on. But how are all these goals going to be achieved under the helm of the Democratic Party? I would like people to think about this. It's why we believe that we need to have an independent political alternative for the working class outside of the Democratic and Republican Party apparatus.

At the end of the day, if the Democratic Party establishment, the powerhouses in the Democratic Party—the Clintons, the Rahm Emanuels and all the Wall Street people they're connected with—if they were indeed in favor of the kind of social change Sanders is talking about, how is it that they are not backing him to the hilt? How is it that they are not putting their entire might behind his campaign?

You know, they are always blaming the Republicans. Well, here is a guy who is willing to put himself on the line and really fight for social and racial justice and economic justice, and what they are doing is not putting their might behind him but instead scrambling for options to undermine him. I think if we miss that, then we're missing the fundamental truths about corporate politics.

"We have a long row to hoe. But it shows you that you can achieve that position of power; you can win that election on a principled basis, without any shady compromises, without taking a penny from corporations."

Q: The word "socialist" is not well understood in America. But when people see you in action in Seattle, running for office as a socialist, serving as a socialist, people get a sense of it, don't they?

Sawant: That's very true, absolutely. One thing that a lot of long-time activists might miss—liberals and progressives might miss—is that the younger generations didn't grow up in the Cold War. And so they don't have an automatic suspicion of socialism because they have no relationship to the idea of socialism. It's not something that they're familiar with.

For the younger generation, what's important is that this society that they're living in—whether they articulate it to themselves as capitalism or not—has failed them miserably. That engenders the idea of collective struggle.

When you see large numbers of people your age in the same situation, it makes you think. It can't be that millions of young people are doing something wrong if they are saddled with tens of thousands of dollars of student debt. It points to where there is systemic failure. And so for a lot of young people the questioning is about the system they live in. They are eager for alternatives. ◆

This Just In: Greed not Good

All right, kids. Get this. And get it straight. Gordon Gekko was wrong. Greed is not good. Greed is bad. Greed eats away at the core of society like a parasitic leech the size of Manitoba. Or Saskatchewan. One of those provinces or territories or protectorates or whatever they use in Canada to keep their license plates distinctive.

And practicing and/or defending greed makes you nothing but a blood-sucking tick no matter how fancy a suit you're wearing. Or the size of the diamonds around your wrist. Or how free-range the organic heirloom Chicken Florentine is on your plate.

Gekko's quote originated in the movie *Wall Street*, which premiered in 1987. And after Vietnam and Watergate and an oil embargo and four years of scolding by Jimmy Carter, a little irrational exuberance may have seemed warranted. But that was almost thirty years ago. Too much is no longer not enough. Too much has gotten way out of hand. Today's too much is much much too much.

In his U.N. address, the Pope said it best: "A selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged."

You know what? He's right. Got to love Papa Frankie. The guy is like a slightly older, more lovable Argentinian Bernie Sanders, with the crank dialed down to a manageable hum.

Let's be honest. What we're really talking about here is that idiot CEO Martin Shkreli, who raised the price of the life-saving drug Daraprim from $13.50 a pill to $750, because, and I quote, he "needs to start making a profit." A 5,455 percent increase, which if applied to onions would make a side of rings about three grand.

PAUL CORIO

This rapacious price gouge follows in the carnivorous footsteps of Gilead Sciences, which developed a drug called Sovaldi, a treatment for Hepatitis C. The treatment regimen consists of eighty-four pills. Each one costing $1,000. That's right. $84,000. But then you're cured. After all, how much is your life worth? Half of what you own? Everything? Your first born?

Shkreli initiated the humongous hike immediately after the company he founded, Turing Pharmaceuticals, purchased the marketing rights to Daraprim. They don't make it, they just sell it. He said he raised the price for research and development for other drugs, which will undoubtedly cost patients an arm and a leg. No. Literally.

Gilead Sciences is publicly traded, but Turing Pharmaceuticals has no stockholders to report to or take directions from. Just Shkreli, a former hedge-fund manager. A group known for having the same conscience as starving hyenas in heat. These guys make a safari of lion-killing dentists look cuddlesome.

Remember the traders who advised clients to buy stocks that they themselves were getting rid of? Them's our boys. The mindset of a hedge funder is whatever it takes to make the most money: lie, cheat, steal, and worse. They rewrote the book on worse.

And now that worse includes letting people die for profit. We need to change the debate from whether to tax hedge-fund managers at the same rate as real humans to deciding how long the season for hedge-fund manager hunting should be.

What's to keep these guys from creating diseases for which their companies conveniently have the available antidote? Ethics? How often have Republicans lectured us: There's no such thing as ethical consideration, only business.

Speaking of the ethically bereft, even Donald Trump weighed in on the calumny, calling the price hike a disgrace and saying that Shkreli should be ashamed of himself. When a man who blatantly sucks up to bigots and racists calls you shameless, it's time to rethink your priorities. ◆

Will Durst is an award-winning, nationally acclaimed comic. Go to willdurst.com for info about his new one-man show "BoomeRaging: From LSD to OMG."

Brain Damaged in the NFL

Do we really want to know how the National Football League makes its sausage?

That's the question that came to mind when the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Boston University recently released a comprehensive report showing that eighty-seven out of ninety-one former NFL players tested positive for the debilitating brain disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which has been linked to concussions.

The study in no way means that 96 percent of former players will develop the disease. This was a self-selected group. The subjects' families chose to have their loved ones autopsied based upon their behavior at the end of their lives. However, the number was shocking even to those expecting the worst.

Here is the kicker: The study found the disease in 79 percent of all football players examined—even if they only played at the high school or collegiate level. This means that people who do not necessarily play the sport with the biggest, strongest, and fastest players on Earth—but who just receive the ordinary "sub-concussive" hits on every play—are also susceptible to chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

This story comes on the heels of an ugly soap opera at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, which tried to block the late Hall of Famer Junior Seau's daughter, Sydney, from making a speech at her father's induction. Every honoree gets to choose someone to make that speech and it was Seau's wish that it be Sydney. But the Seau family filed a suit against the NFL after Seau's 2012 suicide. The twenty-year veteran shot himself in the heart so that his brain could be more easily examined by doctors.

The NFL is in a PR crisis over the fact that science and discovery are clearly not its friend. The more we know, the worse it looks for the long-term health of the sport.

For years, the league fronted a now discarded and utterly embarrassing "Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Committee" that published medical-sounding proclamations declaring "no NFL player" had ever been diagnosed with brain damage as a result of concussions. The committee also proclaimed that "professional football players do not sustain frequent repetitive blows to the brain on a regular basis."

This strategy drew comparisons of the NFL with the tobacco industry. But unlike the tobacco industry, the NFL did not have the privilege of existing in an age before social media. The committee was debunked so widely that the league, under the leadership of Roger Goodell, has taken an entirely different tack. Now it invests money into more research. Now it hangs posters in every locker room to "educate" players about whether or not they may be experiencing brain injury. Now it talks constantly about the lower concussion rates that have resulted from rule changes.

Yet just as the tobacco industry lied when it claimed that it could create a cancer-free cigarette, there is no such thing as an NFL game without the "sub-concussive" hits that neurologists say are the root of chronic traumatic encephalopathy. Meanwhile, as the NFL speaks publicly about creating a safer game, the league is also settling with 5,000 damaged players out of court to avoid future litigation. And it is holding "moms clinics" around the country to stem the dramatic lowering of youth participation in the sport, seen as an existential threat to the game.

This schizophrenic approach is symbolized dramatically by Commissioner Goodell, a man who took the "Ice Bucket Challenge" against Lou Gehrig's disease while still maintaining that there are no provable connections between playing pro football and that horrific condition, even though science and the painful experiences of numerous ex-players and their families say otherwise.

We are now left with the curious sight of a pro football world that has never been more popular and never been in more peril, a game where the greatest drama of all, that of survival for the league and its players, is taking place off the field. ◆

Dave Zirin is the host of Sirius XM Radio's popular weekly show Edge of Sports Radio *and the sports editor for* The Nation. *His latest book is* Brazil's Dance with the Devil.

The Physics of War

—for Benjamin Johnson and Vincent Parker

1.

You pulled Johnson's greening bones
from the sea. You entered
the Gulf holding a single breath.
You unfolded the nets of your lungs
to gather a million shining fish.

2.

The sea preserves a sailor's name
in salt; for a moment, your body
was more ocean than muscle, more water
than blood. You've run your fingers
through water, thicker than hair.

3.

The rain hitting your window
sounds like Arabic. The Farsi word
for bone is deceit. The Farsi word
for sperm is spark.

4.

Maybe the carbon in your breath
will one day become a perfect ring
inside a tree.

5.

Maybe drowning is your breath
called suddenly back by the trees
from which it came.

6.

The same iron in your blood
once destroyed a star.

7.

Your blood is magnetic—
it can be stretched across the bridge
of a violin, played with a dead
horse's hair.

8.

Roman soldiers were once paid in salt.

9.

American soldiers once made gunpowder
from wood ash and piss.

10.

This wetness between your wife's thighs
recently fell from a thunderhead.

11.

If a sailor drowns, his body becomes more
air than dust.

12.

It's possible for the drowned to breathe
through their eyes.

13.

By morning, your last breath has spread across
the Arabian Gulf. In a week, it covers
the Middle East. Years from now, your last
breath will weave its way into all the earth's air,
until you are inside the lungs of the men
who killed you, until we're both breathing you in.

14.

In Ramstein, after nothing remains of your body
but ash, the coroner collects bone pins, gold
fillings from the crematories furnace floor.

15.

Rust is the only fire that water can't put out—
the only fire that tastes like blood.

Brandon Courtney was born and raised in Iowa. He is a veteran of the U.S. Navy. His poetry is forthcoming or appears in Best New Poets, The Boston Review, American Literary Review, *and* American Poetry Review. *His books include* The Grief Muscles *and* Rooms for Rent in the Burning City.

The Life and Legacy of Jimmy Carter

By Amitabh Pal

A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety
By Jimmy Carter
Simon & Schuster. $28. 272 pages.

I have a soft spot for Jimmy Carter.

He's the first President of whom I have any memories. I remember my uncle jovially announcing Carter's election victory at the breakfast table at my home in India. I was mystified by the man my uncle was discussing so delightedly. Some months later, I was in the United States (I did a lot of back-and-forth as a child), and I saw on television the person who was the cause of my uncle's happiness.

I don't remember too many details about Carter's presidency, since I was not even in my teens then. However, I do vividly remember his toothy grin.

My family returned to India when I was twelve. I became more aware of Carter's post-presidency work when I came back to this country as a young man. I saw him briefly in 1996 at a book event in North Carolina. (The occasion was so well attended that the organizers abandoned his planned talk and turned it into just a book signing.)

Then, in 2008, I was able to interview him. I went down to the Carter Center in Atlanta and for three days observed Carter preside over an open government conference. He was intimately involved in the proceedings and very attentive to the particulars, even suggesting amendments to the final declaration.

As soon as the conference ended, I was whisked to his office. Carter was gracious in person and patiently answered my questions. He even gave me a few choice quotes.

"What we have done through our own government is to torture prisoners, to deprive them of their basic rights to legal counsel, even the right of prisoners to be acquainted with the charges against them," he commented on the Bush Administration's record. "Those kinds of things have been cherished as basic principles of American law and American policy for more than 200

Amitabh Pal, author of "Islam" Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle of Nonviolence Today, *is the managing editor of* The Progressive.

years. To have them subverted and abandoned and condemned is just a travesty of justice and a very serious embarrassment to those of us who—as Americans and non-Americans—are committed to human rights."

With the announcement that he is suffering from terminal cancer, Jimmy Carter's presence among us seems to be coming to an end, and the discussion about his life and legacy has intensified.

Perhaps out of compassion, many progressives have been gentle with him. *In These Times* columnist Susan Douglas penned a sympathetic remembrance. And even the radical website *CounterPunch* had a debate of sorts between David Macaray (mostly for Jimmy) and Matt Peppe (mostly against).

Carter's foreign policy was not without blemishes. His support, albeit inconsistent, for dictatorial regimes including the Shah of Iran and the El Salvadoran junta is a particular black mark. Through the Carter Doctrine, he essentially laid claim to the oil resources of the Middle East for the United States. On the economic front, he gave us deregulation of the transport sector and Paul Volcker, the Fed chairman whose interest rate hikes caused the severe recession of the early 1980s. And he was famously socially conservative in some ways.

But Carter comes across better perhaps than any other recent occupant of the Oval Office. There was a moral underpinning to his presidency. He was the only modern President not to engage in U.S. military action (except for the failed Iranian hostage rescue mission). He broke the unwritten code of silence among ex-Presidents to offer harshly critical assessments of our political condition since the election of George W. Bush. Plus, I have a fondness for religious progressivism. Carter was the last of that breed to occupy such high office in this country.

Now, Jimmy Carter has come out with an aptly timed retrospective on his life. In *A Full Life: Reflections at Ninety*, Carter sets out to offer his own assessment on his life and achievements.

The book is a loosey-goosey work, personal in ways good and bad. Interspersed within it are Carter's poems and drawings. I am no poetry or art expert, but these efforts seem a little, well, half-formed.

There are other, better books that Carter has written. His *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (Simon & Schuster, 2005) and *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (Simon & Schuster, 2014) are more coherent and engaging. He quotes fairly extensively from another, *White House Diary* (Picador, 2010), a collection of journal entries published a few years ago.

Like other such tomes, *A Full Life* is too kind to its subject.

"Vice President Mondale summarized our Administration by saying, 'We told the truth, we obeyed the law, we kept the peace,' " he writes self-servingly, if not completely inaccurately. "I would add, 'We championed human rights.' "

Carter portrays himself as almost above politics. There is extended discussion of the good work that the Carter Center has done, from monitoring elections to combating various diseases.

Still, there's enough of interest to make the book worth reading. One thread running through it is Carter's concern for racial equality, starting from his childhood.

His mother, a nurse, instilled in him the notion of racial egalitarianism (in contrast to his dad, who was quite accepting of Jim Crow laws). While he was in the Navy, Carter and his crewmates boldly boycotted a dance in the Bahamas because nonwhite colleagues were not invited. When he was a young farmer, Carter refused to join the White Citizens' Council. As a consequence, members of the John Birch Society spread rumors in his community that he had traveled to Mexico to take part in a communist training camp.

Carter was generally principled on race, but not always. He ran a racially divisive campaign in 1970 for governor, even courting George Wallace, and Carter is disingenuous about that in the book. (He reportedly told Vernon Jordan, "You won't like my campaign, but you will like my administration.") It is true, however, that his governorship and presidency were racially enlightened, especially for their time.

There are some fascinating personal anecdotes. While he was in the Navy, Carter was called on to help disassemble a Canadian nuclear power plant that had suffered a partial meltdown. This had a lasting impact on his views of nuclear weapons. And there is plenty of interesting trivia. You probably didn't know, for instance, that Anwar Sadat was such a big fan of Western films that he watched them every day.

There is also more substantive stuff, including criti-

cism of U.S. foreign policy that is startling coming from an ex-President.

"One of my primary concerns was with the military dictators in Latin America and their fervent American supporters in the commercial sector, along with congressional lobbyists and key people within the State Department and other branches of our governments," he writes. "For generations, the official U.S. policy had been to support these regimes against any threat from their own citizens, who were automatically branded as communists."

And he is candid about the overwhelming power of "legal bribery" on every aspect of government.

Carter's critique of the religious right is interesting, given his evangelical background. He chides its bellicosity during his presidency on the Panama Canal, Iran, and China, and its subsequent takeover of the GOP.

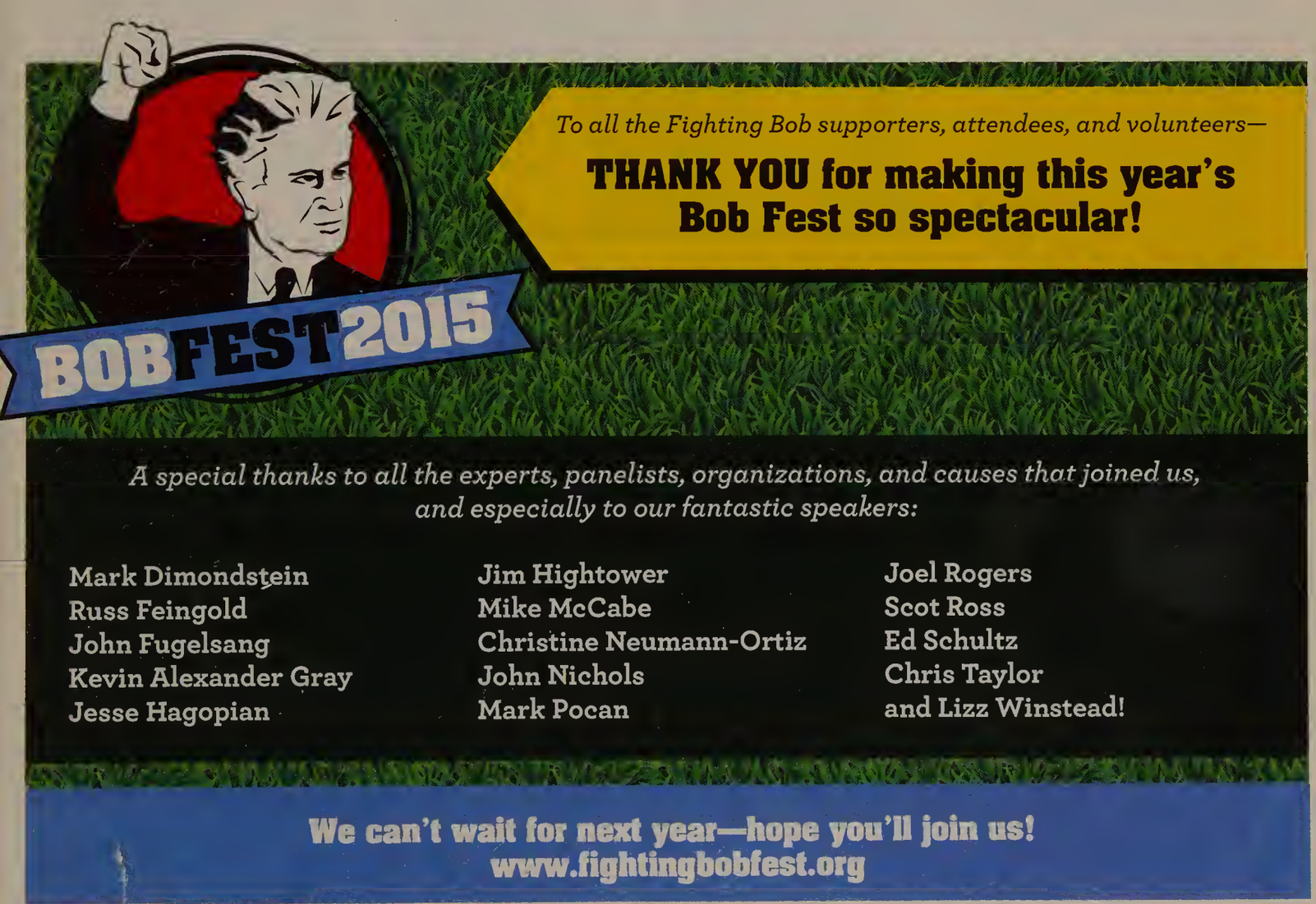
He does timidly back away, however, from his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (Simon & Schuster, 2006), which got him into trouble. He was accused of being an anti-Semite. Advisory board members of the Carter Center resigned in protest, and Democratic Party bigwigs distanced themselves from Carter. It seems that the heat was too much.

"Despite my attempts at book signings and other public events to reiterate my lifelong support for Israel and its security, this altercation has been very painful to me," he writes.

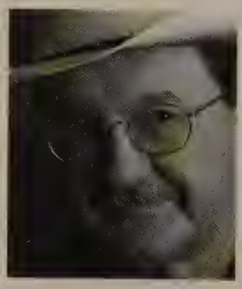
There are a few people Carter has not forgiven. He blames Ted Kennedy for damaging his re-election bid in 1980 by challenging him in the primaries and for torpedoing his eminently workable plan for national health care by holding out for something unattainable. He disses then-German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt for supposed animus toward the United States. And he repeatedly castigates Ronald Reagan.

Carter proudly and deservedly mentions his prescience on the energy front and his attempts at nuclear arms reduction.

It's hard for me to be too critical of this guy. Perhaps it is my lingering memory of that captivating grin. ◆



Bernie and the Billionaires



I have some statistics for you. Wait . . . don't run away! Where are you going? Come back here and sit still while I drill these stats into your head! It'll be fun, and you'll learn something.

I realize that numbers can numb the brain, but this is a good story, and I promise that these statistics are easy to absorb. It's a story of political intrigue and corruption involving some of America's wealthiest families and corporations, and it starts with the number 400.

That's the number of ultra-rich right-wingers that the conniving Koch brothers bring together twice-yearly to plot strategies and pledge money for electing politicos who'll support their dream of corporate rule in America.

For the 2016 elections, the Kochs have already committed nearly a billion dollars to impose their vision of plutocracy on our democratic ideals—double the combined amount that the Republican and Democratic parties will spend. I wonder what they think they're getting for that price?

Keep that 400 number in mind when I offer my sincerest congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Middle Class America, since they are all the rage in this presidential contest. Jeb, Hillary, and all the rest—even The Donald—say their campaigns are about the hurting middle class that hasn't yet recovered from the Great Recession. But after they all promise to do the most for the Great Mass of the Middle Class, they scurry off to schmooze with the exclusive club of multimillionaires and billionaires who are shoveling big bucks into their campaigns.

Super PACs are racking up tens of millions of dollars to back the various presidential candidates. Fewer than 400 families—each writing checks for hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars—have put up nearly half of the money raised in the campaign so far.

JEM SULLIVAN

Jeb Bush got a million dollars each from twenty-six of his Super PAC backers; Hillary Clinton took a million each from nine funders; of the $16 million in Marco Rubio's PAC, 78 percent came from only four donors; and Ted Cruz got the most from the fewest, taking practically all of his $37 million from just three fat cat families.

So while candidates for the highest office in our land are soaking up applause for the grand rhetoric they're giving to the middle class, they're quietly taking millions by pledging their steadfast fealty to the ruling class. Donating millions is not an innocent or noble political transaction. Written on the back of each check is a corporate agenda, trumping the people's agenda.

Ironically, it's Donnie Trump, the bombastic billionaire, who candidly admits that these so-called "gifts" amount to the outright, plutocratic purchase of politicians. He's long been a campaign donor in order to secure political favors, he confesses, and it works: "When I need something from them, they are there for me." There's a word for that: corruption.

There is one exception to this corruption of our politics by fat cats. Instead of being financed by 400 special interests, Bernie Sanders's campaign has raised its $26 million from about 650,000 ordinary Americans. The average donation to Bernie is a heartwarming, soul-saving $31.30!

You can't buy a president for just over thirty bucks, but you can help elect one who isn't owned by Big Money. And isn't that the way democracy ought to be? ◆

Jim Hightower produces The Hightower Lowdown *newsletter and is the author, with Susan DeMarco, of* Swim Against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow.

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Minding the Gap

In recent decades, CEO compensation has been viewed solely through the lens of shareholder value. This has been a mistake. This perspective has not curbed irresponsible risk-taking or the phenomenal growth of pay packages, and may in fact have encouraged these excesses. We believe that a pay package can be so large as to distort decision-making and isolate a CEO from the rest of the corporation. If CEOs are paid to lead an organization and drive long-term value creation, their compensation should be aligned with the interests of the corporation as a whole.

The Dodd Frank Act, passed in the wake of the financial crisis, may have a partial answer to this problem. On August 5, 2015, the Securities and Exchange Commission issued a rule that will require publicly traded corporations to report the ratio between the CEO's compensation and the compensation paid to the median employee.

Ultimately, this relatively simple metric could impact millions of employees around the world, with multiplier effects throughout the economy, if companies seek to reduce the ratio by raising wages. At the same time that we have witnessed the steady growth of CEO compensation, wages have stagnated. To cite one report from the Economic Policy Institute, wage growth for most workers has been weak for virtually the entire period since 1979, and "between 2002 and 2012, wages were stagnant or declined for the entire bottom 70 percent of the wage distribution." These trends are unsustainable. Wage stagnation has fueled our nation's debt burden, and contributed to the financial crisis. Investors ignore this at their peril. How are corporate compensation decisions related to this larger macroeconomic problem? The pay ratio disclosures will help us to answer that question.

At Domini, we seek to understand each company's true value proposition for investors and for society at large. We believe that the pay ratio disclosure will serve as an important indicator of quality management. Companies with lower ratios should benefit in the long-term from more loyal and productive employees and a CEO less focused on short-term stock price movements. A CEO that favors narrowing the gap between her compensation and the median employee may be a leader with a better understanding of the sources of value and innovation at her company. A particularly high ratio may justify a vote against the members of the compensation committee. A particularly low ratio may justify higher CEO compensation than we would ordinarily accept. This figure should also serve as a catalyst for particularly interesting and constructive conversations with management.

In *What Publicity Can Do* (1913), Louis Brandeis wrote that "publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman." Brandeis reasoned that investors will make better decisions if they have relevant information, and their informed decision making will serve as a check on undesirable behavior. He argued that these disclosures can put an end to "unjustly acquired wealth." We view the pay ratio disclosure as a classic "Brandeis indicator"—a figure that once brought to the light of day will operate as a remedial measure.

Will CEOs wish to compete to see who benefits from the most inequitable compensation structure? We will soon find out. Our guess is that they will not.

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